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**Exploring School Governance in the Context of Local Values and Political
Influences in Lalitpur, Nepal: A Narrative Inquiry**

A thesis
submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education
at
The University of Waikato
by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
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Abstract

Nepal is a surreal land of stunning Himalayas, Eastern mystics, and human civilisation rich in culture, traditions, and architecture. In the country, Hindu values have been predominant in shaping people's lives, including respect for schooling education. People are keen to manage schooling education through community effort by joining School Management Committees. After the implementation of Nepal's 2015 Constitution, public schools came under the jurisdiction and management of local governments. As a local in Lalitpur, Nepal, a Hindu believer, and a former public-school teacher and administrative assistant, I became interested in researching how people's local values and the influence of politics build public school governance. My curiosity was further driven by the literature review related to school governance in Nepal where I found limited research and scholarship of areas such as the adoption of Hindu cultural values in school governance in secular Nepal, and the exercise of power to bring about positive reforms in school management. I formulated the research questions: What cultural and social values of groups and communities in Lalitpur encourage working for school governance? How do political influences shape group and community involvement in school governance in Lalitpur?

For my methodology, I choose narrative research, which lies within a social constructionist worldview whereby social reality is conceived as the co-creation of human relations and interactions. I used in-depth interviews and observations of participant engagement related to school governance, during which I interviewed 43 participants involved in school-communities and local governments in Lalitpur. These schools were situated in three local government units in urban, semi-urban, and rural areas with diverse geographies and socio-cultural settings. I developed a method of thematic analysis to interpret the participants' stories by referencing Localism-Eastern Philosophy and New Public Management-Global Governance theories.

I found that Hinduism connected Nepali communities and schools through religious sentiments and made the school environments sacred and peaceful. People's culture of care prepared the foundation for establishing and developing schools in Nepali communities. This caring culture has been passed on as a philanthropic value to the present generation, which aligns with the karma theory in Hinduism. Concerning the political influences in school governance, exercise of power has brought knowledgeable people into SMCs to contribute to the managerial reforms and has facilitated decentralised school governance through local governments. Findings show that locals with conservative values and some stakeholders in schools have misused political authority to take benefits and hinder the growth of school education.

Decentralised education governance is a new practice in Nepal, and in 2025 the country is in a federal transition stage. New education policies are being developed, and my research findings support the establishment of policies that incorporate people's values and the exercise of political authority and power.

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My five-year PhD journey to develop myself as an education researcher, concluded in 2025. This time has been the most joyful, energetic, and curious period in my life. Every day, I had a new plan, excitement, and personal achievement. Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev says, "When you came into this world, you came without a single investment. So whatever happens in your life, any way you are in profit" (Sadhguru, January 18, 2019). This academic achievement in Aotearoa is a significant milestone in my life, made possible by many kind souls to whom I will always be grateful.

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¹ The Guru's divine grace and wise guidance

Declaration

I, Devendra Adhikari, declare that the submitted PhD narrative research is my original work and the conferences and publications arising from this thesis as an author are listed below:

Conferences and Publications Arising from this Thesis

Conferences

Adhikari, D. (2020, November 20). *School management committees in Nepal. Mediators in diverse societies?* [Paper presentation]. Division of Education Conference 2020: University of Waikato, New Zealand

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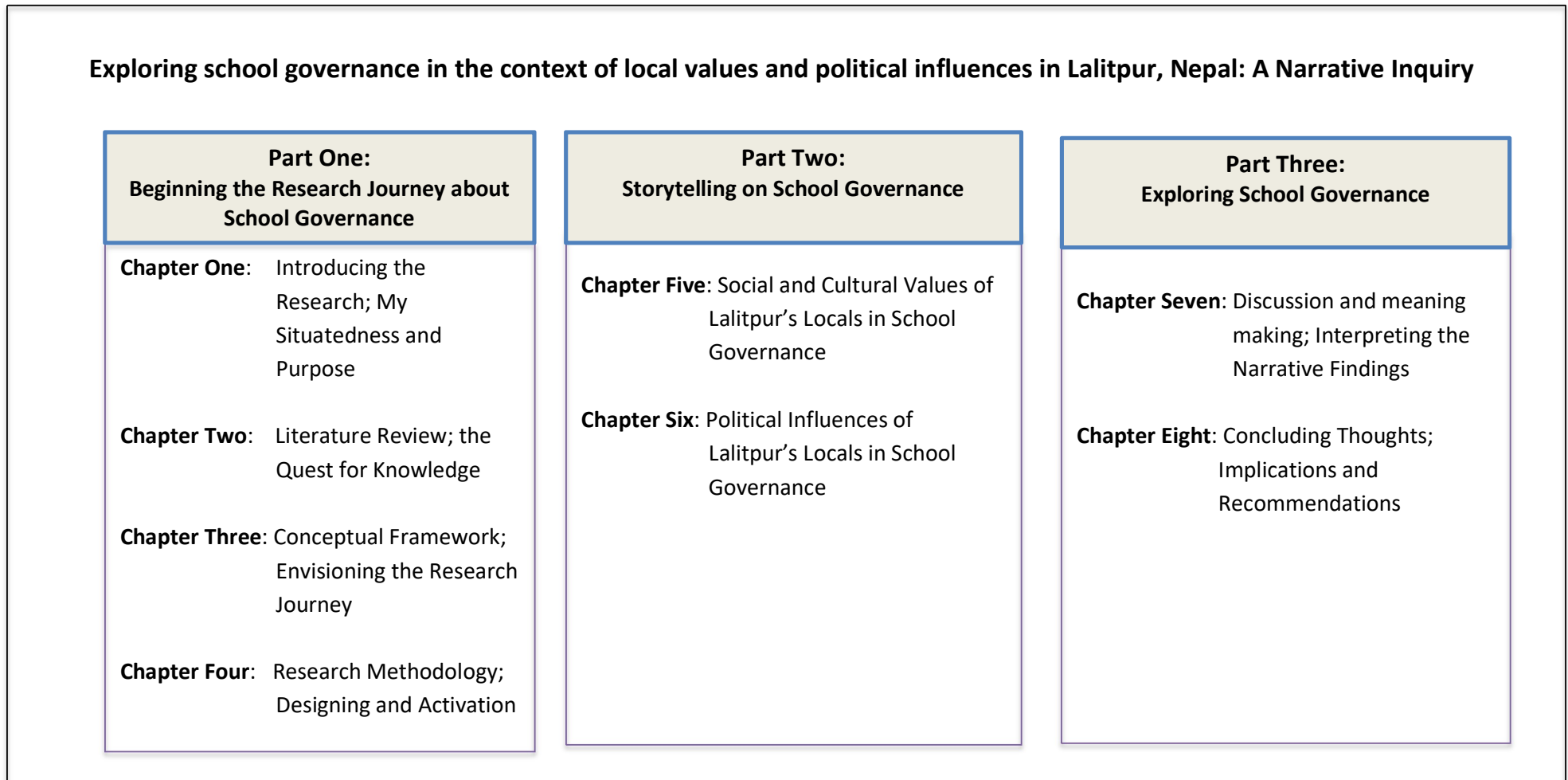
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Thesis Structure

Figure 1 Research's Overview: Narrative Construction and Shaping



Part One

Beginning the Research Journey about School Governance

*“Yatha Dristi,
Tatha Shristhi!”*

I have commenced my research writing on exploring school governance with the above-mentioned Sanskrit Sloka which means, “As is one’s vision, so does the world appear to him”. Part One of my narrative research on school governance represents my vision by situating myself as a Nepali Hindu man, former school teacher and education researcher. These positionalities help me to connect my life stories and perceptions to develop my research's setting and purpose. In this research, I explore school governance in the context of local values and political influences through lived experiences of school stakeholders involved locally in Lalitpur, Nepal.

Part One contains Chapters One – Four, in which Chapter One introduces my interest in conducting this research. I reflect my experiences as a teacher and administrative staff member in a public school in Lalitpur to show how a community’s effort can contribute to school management. My research motivations raised queries to explore school governance deeper and set the purpose for conducting this study. Chapter Two is a literature review which highlights literature concerning people's local values and political influence in school governance in Nepal. The review of scholarly publications showed me research opportunities to delve into school governance in Nepal. Chapter Three conceptualises a model of theoretical and methodological underpinnings that serves to clarify my philosophical underpinning and the potential plan of action to conduct this research. Chapter Four details the narrative methodology which shaped my action plan for conducting the field research in three public schools in Lalitpur. I include how I sought to apply ethical values and practices as a researcher.

Chapter One

Introducing the Research: My Situatedness and Purpose

In this first chapter, I introduce my research on school governance and establish the importance of my study in the context of Nepali public schooling. The prologue of my research journey begins with my cultural identity as a Hindu man and my curiosity to explore educational issues. I then reflect on my position as a former school teacher and administrator, a local in Lalitpur, Nepal, and PhD student who intended to be an educational researcher in Nepal. I introduce School Management Committees (SMCs) with their functions and roles. Public schools are managed through these committees that include parents, locals, elected representatives, and teachers. In the next section, I establish the purpose of my research in exploring school governance in Lalitpur and propose why my research relating to school governance in Nepal is necessary. I devise the research questions, provide a synopsis of each of the chapters of my thesis, and conclude the chapter.

1.1 Prologue: Research Journey

This is my research voyage as a novice researcher that began in January 2020 at the foot of the Himalayas in Nepal and ended in February 2025 in Aotearoa. Nepali society is embedded in Hindu-Buddhist cosmologies that reflect Eastern cultural identity, social connectivity, and spirituality as a part of larger Eastern philosophy (Harrison, 2019; Johnstone et al., 2016). I was born into a Hindu family in 1984 and raised and socialised within a heterogeneous community in Lalitpur. My community is highly devoted to spirituality; every morning, people offer water to the rising sun, go to temples to pray, and have faith in the eternal gods. The community relationship is the strength of my society, which has created a sense of oneness among the residents, so people prefer to live in joint families and care for their ageing parents. My parents prepared me to maintain a cordial relationship with my neighbours and to live a peaceful and happy life in accordance with the caring value systems of the people ascribed by Eastern philosophy that are well scripted in the religious texts of Hinduism. I worked in Nepali schools for many years and observed the value systems of Eastern philosophy in the school management system. Thus, through

enrolment in the PhD program at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, I initiated my plan to explore the roles of people's value systems in school governance in Lalitpur.

Some thought-provoking issues inspired me to undertake academic research on values and school governance in Nepal. Firstly, Nepali communities have generously worked to provide resources, donate land, and work as free labour for schools for many generations. I wish to unpack the cultural and philanthropic values that motivate people to manage public schools in Nepal. Secondly, whilst Nepali societies are socio-culturally and linguistically diverse, the Hindu religion and the Nepali language dominate the country's education system (Nepal Curriculum Development Center, 2007, 2019; Parajuli & Das, 2013). Despite this dominance, the community-managed school governance model is being successfully implemented across the country through meaningful engagement of local Nepali people. Government data shows that the decentralisation model of school management through communities has contributed to better educational outputs (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2016). Aside from these social and cultural values in school governance, I was interested in uncovering the complementary roles of School Management Committees (SMCs) in bringing people together for schools in religiously, culturally, and linguistically diverse societies in Lalitpur. The engagement of parents, communities, political-party representatives, and local governments in the SMCs was a political exercise in school governance, which was an interesting area to research. With these quests in mind, I began my research journey in exploring school governance in Lalitpur, Nepal.

1.2 Connecting Dots: Positionalities and This Study

An identification of one's own positionalities helps a researcher to self-reflect and be situated in research (Holmes, 2020). As a teacher and administrative assistant at a public school, I was familiar with the public-school governance modality in Nepal, the engagement of communities, and the power relations existing between parents, Head Teachers and teachers, School Management Committees (SMCs), and elected representatives of local governments. Having the status of a Hindu believer helped me understand the social and cultural values of Nepali people and as a local and a former research student at Kathmandu University, I was able to establish relationships with the schools in Lalitpur where I planned to conduct this study. Furthermore, my local identity helped me to develop a relationship of

trust with my participants during the COVID-19 pandemic's havoc when collecting data. In addition, I recall some past experiences as a teacher in Lalitpur.

I worked in the Nepali education sector for over a decade after I completed my high school education in 2003. After completing a bachelor's degree at the start of 2006, I was waiting for the publication of my results. Without pass certificates and hands-on experience, getting teaching jobs in Nepal is difficult. I was always passionate about working in a school to share knowledge with young learners and to enrich mine. I gained a position in the public Choina Ganesh Lower Secondary school, named after the holy Hindu god Ganesh, near my residence in Lalitpur. I met the Head Teacher and lodged my application to work as a volunteer teacher. Everyone would call him a Head Sir or Chaudhary Sir; Chaudhary was his surname, and it is common to call teachers by their surnames in Nepali schools. Chaudhary Sir was happy with my decision to serve as an unpaid teacher because the school lacked enough teachers to run classes. He told me he would present my request for discussion by the SMC. This shocked me. Prior to this, I had thought that the Head Sir had the authority to recruit volunteer teachers himself, but I found the SMC looked after the overall management of the school.

A meeting with the SMC was arranged in the school hall on a Saturday during a weekend holiday in Nepal. I entered the meeting hall with the respectful greetings of Namaskar by joining both hands to everybody. I looked at the familiar faces of the members of the committee who were my neighbours, relatives, teachers, and local political leaders. They reviewed and rigorously discussed my application, and the Head Sir took notes of the conversation. After an hour, the committee agreed to allow me to work as a volunteer teacher at the school but sought my commitment to work for at least one academic year. I happily signed the employment contract. I was surprised to see the teamwork of the community people in the management of the school, but some questions came to mind: Why did the community gather to recruit a volunteer teacher for the school? Why was the meeting held on a public holiday? Why was the school hall chosen as the venue for the meeting? Why did the Government not hand the Head Teacher the sole authority to make administrative work decisions? Nonetheless, it was not my business as my employment fulfilled my dream of becoming a teacher in a public school and helping young learners.

After three months of volunteering at the Choina Ganesh School, I was recruited as a privately funded teacher. Public schools in Nepal lack teachers so these schools have the right to recruit such teachers with their internal resources. The school offered me a monthly salary of 2500 Nepali Rupees (31 NZ Dollars). This was collected from three sources: the school 1500, SMC Chair 500, and Head Sir 500. I knew it was a very minimum salary as colleagues in the school who were permanent received 15,000 Nepali Rupees from the Government. However, I consulted with my family and continued the job there because I enjoyed teaching in a public school, and I supplemented my income by home-tutoring students from private schools.

I still remember my teaching days at the Choina Ganesh school. Since I had completed my schooling in a privately-owned institutional school, I was unfamiliar with a public school's educational process of pedagogy, curriculum, policy, assessment, and governance and management. Chaudhary Sir assigned me to teach science and maths subjects, but I had to conduct a brief physical training exercise and prayers every morning on the playground. Apart from teaching, I had to assist Head Sir in his administration work by attending several SMC meetings and taking notes of the discussions. Consequently, I gathered various pedagogical and administrative experiences whilst working at the school for two years.

During my working days at the Choina Ganesh Lower Secondary school, I was highly influenced by the support the parents and community gave to the smooth functioning of the school's administration. They would gather for SMC meetings to sort out administrative and educational issues through discussions, would come to the school to monitor teachers' attendance, conduct exams on time, publish results, and send teachers to training courses. Once, a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) offered financial help to construct a new toilet at the school but on the condition that the community supported the construction by carrying bricks, sand and concrete. The SMC happily signed the agreement, and building work started the next day. I observed the parents, community, teachers, and students' outstanding teamwork in effectively utilising the donor's funds. In a week, a disability-friendly toilet was constructed at the school. The following week, the community gathered again, and representatives from the NGO and the SMC Chair inaugurated the toilet. There was a kind of celebration on that day, with a dance performance from the students.

The community's feelings and togetherness could be seen in students as well. Nearly all the students were from low-income families and so-called low caste groups in Nepali society. However, they were very brilliant and creative in drawing, singing, dancing, and drama. I would see the smaller kids coming to school holding the index finger of their older brothers or sisters. The students used to bring their footballs, skipping ropes, and table tennis bats to share because the school did not have enough resources to spend on those extracurricular activities. If somebody got hurt in the playground, many students would come to the office room carrying that injured student and would wait until proper first aid treatment was administered. I was surprised to see such a vast pool of wisdom among these students, wisdom that could come from their cultural value of Hinduism, which teaches the lessons of belongingness and humanity.

Despite these positive aspects, the school's educational quality was poor compared with private schools. The Government provided very few teachers to the Choina Ganesh school. The school could not be upgraded from Grade Seven, although it was established two decades earlier. The pass rates and learning outcomes of students were poor, so locals gradually started taking their children out of the school and enrolling them to nearby private schools. The SMC members would raise serious concerns about the activities of the Head Sir and the school's poor performance, but the problems remained the same. The Head Sir had direct power relationships with the officials in the District Education Office² (DEO), something I learned on a day when there was an inspection visit by DEO authorities to the school. The Head Sir had asked all the teachers to be punctual on that day and the school maids to properly clean the grounds and classrooms. Later the authorities came to the school, talked with him for an hour, had a good lunch, and left. During the visit, they did not talk with teachers, students, parents, and locals. After their visit, I could not see any positive school changes such as teaching-learning, management, and regularity of teachers. This incident taught me about the exercise of power in a public school.

In 2013, I joined a private school, Eris Academy, as a mathematics teacher. The school director was the school's owner, and all school power was centralised around her. A competent and highly qualified school principal was assigned to monitor and support

² The Central Ministry of Education worked through the DEOs in Nepal. This provision was changed after the promulgation of the 2015 Constitution.

educational activities. The parents of the students had to pay monthly tuition fees. Apart from tuition, students got different facilities, including a bus service, library, science lab, hostel, computer class, food canteen, dance and music lessons, drama class, visits, and sports. The school's management was strict, and teachers were dedicated to their work. I would rarely see parents coming to the school to work with the school administration; however, in spite of this, the performance of the students in the Secondary Education Examination was excellent.

Sometimes, I compare the above-discussed two schools while considering Nepal's education system. The first school, Choina Ganesh Lower Secondary, was a public school where education was completely free. It was a choice made out of necessity for so-called low caste groups, lower-income families, and families migrating from rural villages. The teachers had permanent jobs, and they received good salaries. The school building was built on government land and had a big playground. However, the school lacked resources such as sports materials, student stationery, science and computer labs, good toilets, safe drinking water, and lights and fans in classrooms. In spite of these deficiencies, there was a sense of ownership by the parents and community towards the school. They would come to the school to attend meetings to support school management. Furthermore, they would assist in cleaning the school premises, gathering local financial resources, constructing toilets, repairing windows and doors, colouring the school walls and the temple, and asking donors to support the school. Their energy was focused on uplifting the education standards of the school through sound management. The power relationships between the Head Teacher, SMC, and DEO were visible in the school's activities. Despite these, the motives of parents and locals were guided by their values to work together in achieving the common societal goal of educational development.

On the other hand, the second school, Eris Academy, was the choice of good-earning and middle-class families. The school's primary intention was as a business where parents were the consumers who purchased education for their children. There was no social connectedness between the school and the community. This was reflected in another big difference between these two schools. In the first school, while I was being selected for the job, the SMC sought for my commitment to work for at least one academic year. If I left my job in the middle of the year, their children would suffer. The value systems of community

people were centred on the quality of education and the student's future. In the second school, I was asked about my salary requirement while I was getting recruited. This institutional school system focused on profit and loss calculations.

Time moved swiftly onward. In 2019, I was walking along the roadside of the same public school, Choina Ganesh where I began my teaching career. I could see a big building under construction and the older one being demolished. On the fact sheet placed at the worksite, I could read that it was being built with the support of the Government of Nepal. A total of five million Nepali Rupees had been allocated through the initiative of the Honourable Member of Nepal's State Parliament, Ms Maina Achhami. She is a local resident and politician, and a former president of the school's SMC. The contractor was actively mobilising his workers, and some community members were busy assisting the labourers by passing bricks, cement bags, and pebbles in the bamboo baskets. One of the committee members was writing the meeting minutes of the gathering. It was Saturday, so the school was closed, and students and teachers weren't in attendance, but I could see the community was actively engaged in assisting the school building work.

For over a decade, I have noticed that committee members' faces have changed, but their selfless and self-motivated support towards the Choina Ganesh school remains the same. Although they do not receive any money or reward for engaging in such social work, they enthusiastically work for the betterment of the school in their community. My curiosity makes me question: Is it because their children are studying in school? Is it due to the mandatory laws of the Government of Nepal that every public school should have a SMC to look after its governance? Are there particular local values guiding the locals to work as a team and contribute to the school's effective management and governance? How do NGOs and government agencies collaborate and help schools? Why do people who are involved in politics of education want to bring funding to schools? Why do local stakeholders engage in the exercise of power in public schools? These questions frequently cross my mind. Overall, the generous support of the community to the school management helps to shape the future of children through sound management and improved quality education. These considerations have inspired me to explore school governance in the contexts of local values and external influences, such as politics. This leads me to a discussion of the management of public education in Nepal.

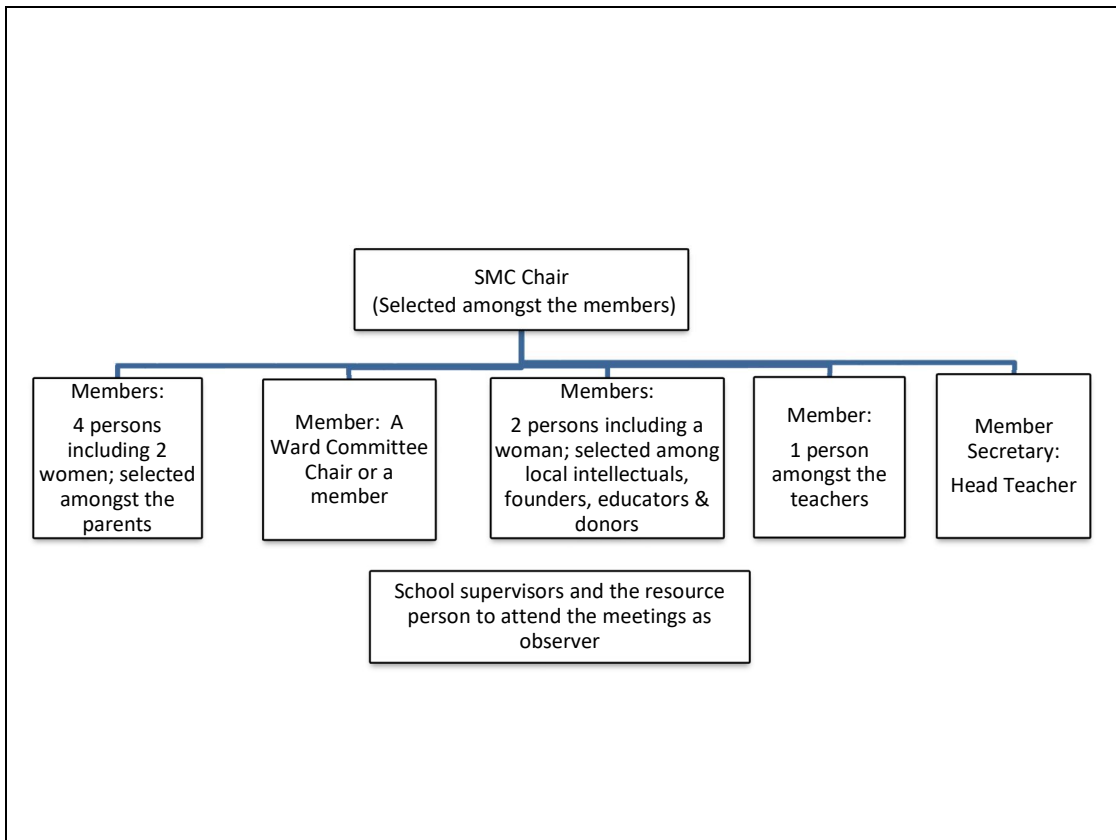
1.3 Management of Public Education in Nepal: A Background

In Nepal, there are 26454 public, 1154 religious, and 6760 private schools, with more than 80% of students being enrolled in state-funded public and religious schools (Nepal Ministry of Finance, 2022). The 2015 Constitution assures free schooling education in the country (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2015), and there is considerable investment by the Government in maintaining good quality education. Nepal's Ministry of Finance (2019) data shows that at least one-tenth of the annual budget is allocated to the education sector.

Nepal's education development initiatives began after the democratic movement in 1990 (Kharel, 2017). The Seventh Amendment of the 1971 Education Act in 2001 provided for SMCs in every public school to supervise, manage, and operate school activities. The Act also includes the rights, roles, and responsibilities of the SMCs. The idea of community management of public schools was formally initiated in 2003 with the financial support of the World Bank (Sharma, 2008). Later in 2016, the Eighth Amendment of the Education Act determined that the SMCs comprise nine members, with the Chair being selected from the members. There are four parent representatives, of which at least two are required to be women, two members are selected from donors, educators, founders, and local intellectual groups with at least one being a woman, a representative from the Ward office³, a teacher and the Head Teacher. The SMCs invite government officials like school supervisors and resource persons to the meetings as observers. The structure of the SMC is shown in the diagram in Figure 2 (see Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b).

³ The lowest level of local Government. In the 753 local government units, there are 6743 wards in Nepal.

Figure 2 Diagrammatic Representation of the SMC in Nepal



The 1971 Education Act of Nepal has devolved the SMC's functions, rights, and duties as follows (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b, pp. 32-33):

- Mobilise the resources and means available for the operation of the school.
- To maintain and protect the records of the movable and immovable property of the school.
- Maintain and update the records of the academic, physical, and financial data and details of the school.
- Approve the annual budget of the school and inform the Village Education Committee or District Education Office.
- Maintain the academic environment of the school and minimise negative influences of party politics, religion, and communality.
- Assign duties to each teacher appointed by the District Education Office.
- Carry out the annual audit of the school by the auditor appointed by the District Education office.
- Take necessary action following the auditor's report and submit the necessary reports to the District Education Office.
- Abide by the orders and instructions issued by the District Education Committee and District Education Office.
- Arrange for the remuneration and facilities of the teachers who have been appointed or promoted by the committee itself.
- Constitute the Teacher-Parent Association as specified to enhance academic standards.

The above work responsibilities of the SMCs indicate that an SMC is not limited to school management but is involved in whole school governance. School management is related to day-to-day administrative tasks, whereas school governance is about making school plans and their implementation, resource exploration and mobilisation, and enhancing educational quality (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2009). An SMC accommodates multi-stakeholders such as parents, locals, elected representatives, teachers, and Head Teacher to maintain a sound academic environment and implement good school governance practices. The 2015 Constitution states that twelve years of school education is free in Nepal, so it is the collective responsibility of all local and central stakeholders to ensure educational quality with proper management. Community, parents, and local governments are the essential stakeholders in facilitating funding, policies, legislation, and providing leadership to sustain school education. In Nepal, a community is always at the forefront of a public school's management and governance.

1.4 My Motivations: Purpose of the Study

Nepal's education system and policies are guided by Eastern philosophy (Nepal Curriculum Development Center, 2007, 2019), with many public schools being named after Hindu deities, and there are temples of the Hindu Goddess *Saraswati* in almost all public school. The Goddess is an emblem of knowledge, and students and teachers offer daily prayers to enrich their wisdom. Schools celebrate the *Basanta Panchami*, a Hindu festival in February, as enrolment day because parents believe that this festival is an auspicious day for children to start school. These examples indicate that Hindu cultural values influence the education system in Nepal as part of the broader framework of Eastern philosophy. Eastern philosophy has values to bind parents, community, local elected representatives, and teachers within a thread of collectivism in managing school activities.

Eastern philosophy, which engages community strength, has cultural and social values to support school governance in Nepal. However, there is a claim by the Nepal National Planning Commission that in the present Nepali educational context, there are multiple problems regarding educational quality, good management, infrastructure, and sufficient funding (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2020a). The community cannot tackle these issues of quality of education in isolation. In my experience, it is the politicians who can bring funds from the Government to the schools in Nepal. Political developments

have resulted in making and implementing educational legislation in the country, which provide space for political parties to rule school policies (D. P. Bhattarai, 2022; Pherali, 2012). Amid these external political influences in schools, I believe that the elements of Eastern philosophy are an integral part of maintaining good governance in schools in Nepal.

There are researchable questions: How does the Eastern knowledge system contribute to the components of school management and governance? What motivates local people to contribute to enhancing school education? How do the SMCs function in diverse communities in Nepal? How is power exercised in SMCs amongst parents, teachers, locals, and elected representatives? What are the intentions behind donor countries support for education reform in Nepal? These questions have motivated me to explore issues of school governance and in the contexts of local values which are social and cultural, and political influences in Nepal.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions have been devised to meet the purpose of my study.

- What cultural and social values of groups and communities in Lalitpur, Nepal, encourage working for school governance?
- How do political influences shape group and community involvement, or otherwise, in school governance in Lalitpur, Nepal?

1.6 Thesis Overview

This thesis consists of eight chapters which are organised in three parts as follows.

Part One: Beginning the Research Journey about School Governance includes Chapters One to Four in which I introduce my research, explore limitations in the literature, present the research's conceptual framework, and detail the methodology. Chapter One is the introductory chapter in which I set the scene of my personal and professional background and develop the purpose and research questions of this study. Chapter Two is the literature review in which I discuss scholarly work related to school governance, community value systems, politics in education, and role of donors in education, relevant to Nepali education. I identify research limitations in the areas of school governance, which assists me to envision research opportunities on school governance in Nepal. Chapter Three presents the conceptual framework as an underpinning model for the research. This framework shows how I interplayed theories and explored school governance. Chapter Four

is the methodology of how the research was conducted. Detail is provided around the use of the narrative inquiry methodology to explore the lived experiences of my participants.

Part Two: Storytelling on School Governance includes Chapters Five and Six, in which I present the participants' narratives as evidence to meet the purpose of my research. Here I storied the interviews of forty-three participants under different themes related to answering the research questions. Chapter Five's narrative findings addresses my first research question: What cultural and social values of groups and communities in Lalitpur, Nepal, encourage working for school governance? Chapter Six's narrative findings relate to my second research question: How do political influences shape group and community involvement, or otherwise, in school governance in Lalitpur, Nepal?

Part Three: Meaning- making and Conclusion includes Chapters Seven and Eight. In Chapter Seven, I interpret the narrative findings using the literature, theories, and my reflections. Chapter Eight presents the conclusion of my research and its implications for academia and policies.

1.7 Chapter Summary

I have introduced my research's purpose to conduct narrative research in exploring school governance in Nepal. I have demonstrated my suitability for this research through my positionalities as a Hindu man, a local of Lalitpur, and a former school teacher in Nepal. The composition of an SMC and its functions set a background to craft this research. The research questions aim to meet this study's purpose and guide the chapters in the thesis. These questions have specified that my area of research includes school governance, social and cultural values of people in Nepal, and political influences in schools. In Chapter Two, I detail the literature review, which highlights the locals' social and cultural values and the roles of politics related to school governance in Nepal. The literature review has identified existing knowledge concerning school governance in Nepal and research opportunities.

Chapter Two

Literature Review: The Quest for Knowledge

In this chapter, I present a review of academic publications relating to the social and cultural values of people in Nepali society and the influence of politics in schooling education. I have found the existing knowledge discourse in Nepali school governance and research has limitations that inform my study. My findings and the meaning-making given in the Parts Two and Three, address these research limitations. The review has identified applicable theories to explain the participants' narratives and to strengthen the purpose of the research (Charles Sturt University, 2022).

I have reviewed literature on governance and located how school governance is practised in Nepal. I have found research limitations in defining the constituents of Nepali school governance. The review of people's local values provided me with insights into researching the community's cultural values in school governance through the perspective of Eastern Philosophy. I have also reviewed the literature from the perspective of the role of party politics and donors in school's managerial and infrastructure development and have identified research limitations related to political influences on school governance. I have signalled the narrative inquiry research methodology and theories including Localism- Eastern Philosophy and New Public Management- Global Governance to conceptualise my research and interpret the narrative findings.

2.1 Terminologies

Below are explanations of terms I frequently use in this research; namely, local and external stakeholders, governance and management of schools, quality education, and local values.

2.1.1 Local Stakeholders and the External Stakeholders

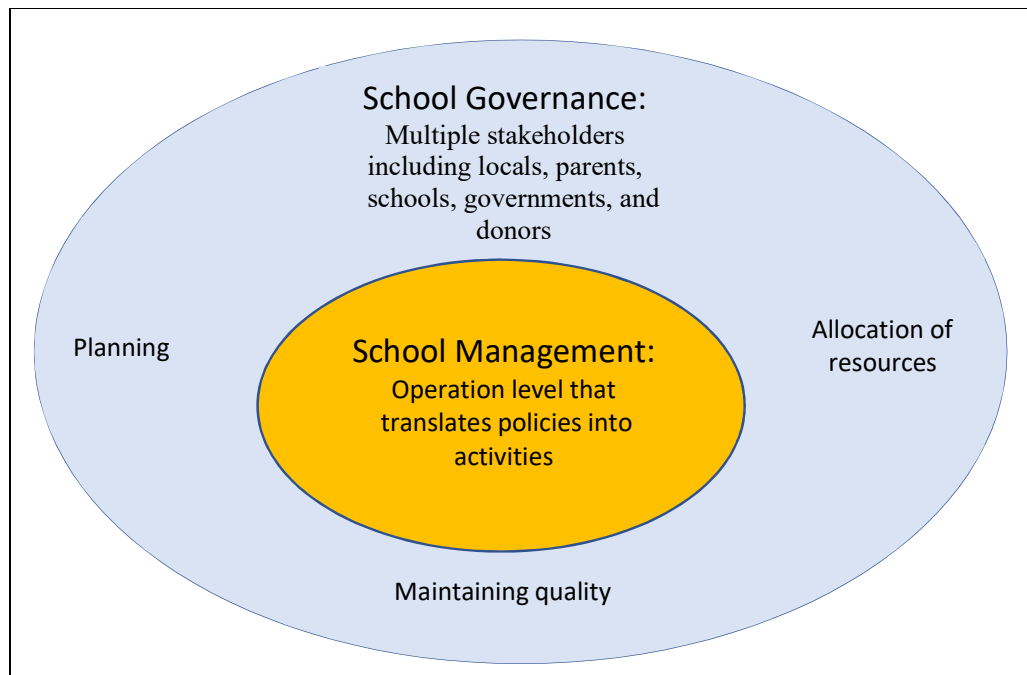
Based on my experiences as a former public-school teacher and administrative assistant, I define a SMC as a mixture of local (insiders) and external stakeholders. The locals represent the stakeholders who reside close to the school and have a long relationship with a school. These are community members, parents, and teachers who use local ideas to perform school management roles and provide moral and financial support. They are active at schools through the SMCs and PTAs, which directly contribute to governance systems.

The external stakeholders include the actors involved in policy making, bringing in more significant funding, and crafting prominent legislation and acts. These external agents are the people and institutions who control schools through their powerful roles and status; these agents include political parties, central and local government authorities, locally elected representatives, bureaucrats, Education Officers, and Non-government Organisations (NGOs). I mention local governments and locally elected representatives under this category as they engage in schools to impose their political agendas through educational acts and policies. They establish relations with teachers, school administrators, parents, and influence school governance structures through broader power relations. Likewise, NGOs are also critical external agencies as they dominate international funding organisations. The NGOs help frame different educational plans and policies and provide financial support to implement these.

2.1.2 Governance and Management of Schools

Nepal Ministry of Education (2009) defines governance of schools as a macro-idea related to making school plans, exploring resources, defining and achieving the indicators of quality education, and providing quality education to all children. School management is the component that transforms the policies into practice and involves a dedicated team that includes teachers and staff. The differences between school governance and management are shown in Figure 3, based on the Nepal School Sector Reform Plan 2009-2015 (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 89).

Figure 3 *School Governance and Management*



In Nepal, schools are managed by the Head Teacher and administrative staff with the assistance of the school committees, such as School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs). These committees include parents, locals, school administration, and elected representatives who work together to maintain sound school governance (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b).

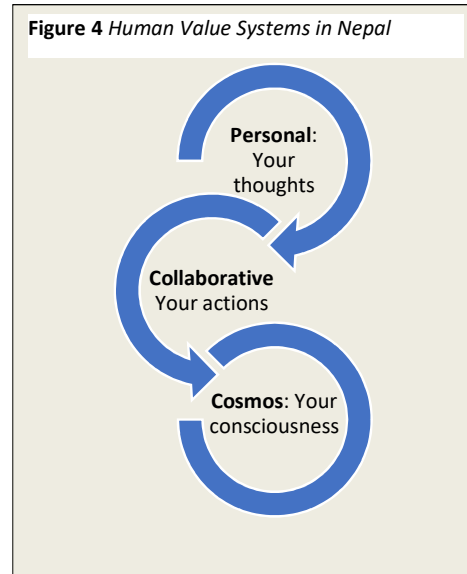
2.1.3 Quality Education

Globally, the United Nations is committed to providing quality education to all children, as indicated in the Goal Four of the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2021). Every child is entitled to receive an education as a fundamental human right (United Nations, 2015). In the Nepali educational context, the 2015 Constitution guarantees free schooling education (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2015). Several academics have explained quality education in Nepal, including Pasha and Bourn (2020) who suggested that quality education can be viewed through both quantitative and qualitative achievements. In my experience, the quantitative domain represents the pass scores and results, the number of trained teachers, and the availability of basic requirements for students, such as buildings, books, the Internet, among others. The qualitative domain includes how the curriculum relates to the overall growth of a child and how a child can potentially use their knowledge

for everyone's benefit. I believe that quality education is one of the outcomes of sound school governance.

2.1.4 Local Values: Cultural and Social

Values are specific belief systems of an individual or a group of people that enable them to understand the self and the world around them. These human faiths shape identity, habits, and attitudes (Shrestha & Gupta, 2019). People derive values from socialisation, culture, traditions, religions, and interactions. These values are the moral guidelines that set society's regulations and people's actions (Schwartz, 2006). Values also shape the thinking and activities of humans (Bonetto et al., 2021). Values are embodied in human cultural practices to help attain a good quality of life and welfare of the masses (Dewangan, 2021). Values are the outcome of the social and cultural philosophies which people have lived by for a long time.



Eastern philosophy is one of the oldest knowledge systems in the Indian subcontinent, where Hinduism and Buddhism are the primary religious practices (Leaman, 1999; Martins, 2018). Nepali societies also practice this philosophy which has largely shaped people's values. As a Nepali citizen, I have experienced that these values are the personal values that reflect our thoughts, the collaborative values that represent our works, and the cosmos values that connects humans with the ultimate consciousness. Figure 4 represents the interconnection among these values in three layers.

The first layer to understanding human value is the personal level. In the Hindu holy book Geeta, verse 17.3, says, "Faith is a person's core, whatever his faith is, he is" (Radwan, 2019, p. 95), which means how we think about ourselves becomes our values. Buddhism believes that human life is full of suffering that can be liberated if we behold the "right understanding, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration" (Kanaparthi & Rani, 2017, pp. 2-3). These moral embodiments can transform humans from suffering to having blissful lives and awakening

them spiritually. These also suggest that actual transformation begins with the self. So, at the personal level, values reflect the human thoughts that emerge from self.

In the second layer, human values are more connected to other people through actions and relationships. In Nepal, people live in heterogeneous societies with hundreds of castes and ethnic groups (Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). These societies have morally integrated values such as respect for others, cooperation, compassion, and forgiveness (Shrestha & Gupta, 2019), which promote harmony in living (Subba et al., 2014). These societies have faith in the law of karma which encourages people to devote themselves to work without expecting returns (Chakraborty, 2014). The communitarian values strongly stands to build a resilient and resourceful society to survive and grow together (Nikku, 2019). The teachings in Hinduism are oriented towards the service of others that makes “harmony for oneself, harmony with our neighbours, and fellowmen, and harmony with our environment” (Swarup, 1971, p. 12). I affirm that these moral ingredients have moulded happy, integrity-driven, and harmonious communities in Nepal. Thus, human connectedness and relationships are the second layers of values in Nepali societies.

In the third layer, human values are associated with human consciousness. Hindu people believe that the eternal gods rule this world and that there are universal instructions for every creature living (Valdez, 2015). In Hinduism, human life aims to gain a 'Moksha' or enlightenment, which does not mean gaining physical success and God's grace (Sedlmeir & Srinivas, 2016). Enlightenment is about liberation from thoughts, distancing earthly life, and being connected with unknown cosmic energy (Rajandran, 2017). This mysterious supreme being of consciousness is achieved through “knowledge, devotion, action, and yoga” (Gandhi, 1987, p. iv). The pathway to enlightenment depends on personal values and community values. If we are liberated within and we value the presence of others, it creates an environment that establishes connectivity with our consciousness. Raina and Singh (2018) view that a yogic cycle begins with our harmless thoughts and actions and is completed after we attain *Samadhi*, which is the goal of enlightenment. Thereby, the ultimate level of human value in Hindu societies is self-liberation.

Indeed, good human thoughts and selfless actions are essential in creating cordial societies. These human values in Nepali society are collectively explained by Eastern philosophy. My research is focused on the second layer of human values in which people

collectively put effort into making better schools in Nepal. The next section reviews Nepali school governance discourses and identifies research limitations.

2.2 Governance: Locating Nepali ‘School Governance’

Governance is a legitimate system under which any state or institution is operated. It is viewed from two lenses: One is the power exercised by the government to run its daily administration, implement policies, public service delivery, and enforce law and order; the other relates to an institution’s administration process (Zaharia & Bilouseac, 2009). My research on school governance is limited to the institutional governance, which is commonly viewed through a power perspective. Plumptre and Graham (1999) mentioned:

Governance is the art of steering societies and organisations [...]. Governance involves the interactions among structures, processes and traditions that determine how power is exercised to make, how decisions are taken, and citizens or other stakeholders have their say. Fundamentally, it is about power, relationships and accountability: who has influence, who decides, and how decisionmakers are held accountable. (p. 3)

Similar to the view of Plumptre and Graham, the Nepal Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (2008) defines governance as:

Power relation in an organization or society is expressed through the governance. Governance is a mechanism, process, relationship and institution through which stakeholders articulate their interests, exercise rights and mediate their differences; and it includes values, rules, institutions and process through which people and organization work together to exercise authority, make decisions and achieve the common goal. (p. v)

Stakeholders exercise authority as their right to influence decision-making in a democratic culture. The values and rules of an organisation determine these authorities, which people can use. In a bureaucracy, governance is a practice by which an institution functions through defined laws, values, and power (Weber, 1978, as cited in Fukuyama, 2013). Dailiati (2018) highlighted that if there is a practice of good governance, political power is distributed across hierarchies, and all stakeholders can raise their own voices or through their representatives in the decision-making process. Governance is a crosscutting issue related to human development that appears in all aspects of human lives, including the social, political, economic (Global Facility for Disaster Risk and Recovery, 2014). It is a legitimate

system within an institution which provides space to exercise power to enforce compliance with the organisational values and objectives.

2.2.1 Governance: A Development Buzzword

The governance concept began in early 1990 with the worldwide flow of development aid (Hufty, 2011a). Ekundayo (2017) agreed that the World Bank, an organisation that pioneered governance theory, propounded good governance as a criterion for supporting developing countries. Governance indicators by the World Bank are applied to measure governance subjectively and include: "voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, government effectiveness, regularity control, the rule of law, and control of corruption" (Kaufmann et al., 2010, p. 3). The optimal achievement of these indicators shows that a country's governance system is well-functioning. Good governance is also considered an initiative of New Public Management reforms which aims to make the public sector oriented towards and accountable to the people (Chien & Thanh, 2022).

Good governance is essential to every country as a prerequisite to achieving sustainable development goals; however, bad governance is a threat to social and economic development (Kahar & Nath, 2018). People have better living standards if the country's governance performs well (Helliwell et al., 2014). Good governance makes public institutions accountable, follows the rule of law, and delivers service efficiently and equitably. It supports poor and vulnerable groups in society and helps in their development (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2012). Good governance is central to human development and sustainable economic growth (Gaghman, 2020; Meyer, 2018) and according to Nag (2018) good governance supports free market economic growth by ensuring "human rights, sustainable development and social justice" (p. 129). However, Nag (2018) also states that the situation in developing nations is different as they require a strong state to manage internal problems such as conflicts, support unprivileged classes, and ameliorate poverty; so good governance includes a strong state instead of a free market. Poor or bad governance prevails today due to weak political leadership (Ekundayo, 2017).

The meaning of good governance varies according to people's political context and needs. Established criteria of good governance determined by funding organisations are dominant in developing countries, but there are many approaches to achieving good

governance. "Governance varies across contexts and cultures and has evolved in response to a number of socio-cultural and economic factors" (Gaghman, 2020, p. 189). Thus, the meaning of governance is contextual and dynamic. Gisselquist (2012) explained that it is necessary to define good governance for a particular institution, after which only the areas of governance reform can be reformed. Democratic governance emphasises three core principles: "participation and inclusion, accountability and the rule of law, and equality and non-discrimination" (United Nations Development Programme, 2011). Collaborative governance is a more popular concept in developing countries.

2.2.2 Collaborative Governance

Collaborative governance involves networking among different actors such as the state, NGOs, civil society, and private sector. It adopts a multi-level governance model that prioritises the roles and importance of all stakeholders to achieve a common institutional and development goal. These stakeholders "come together to tackle wicked issues in the policy-making and implementation process" (Ysa et al., 2014, p. 15). As the governance beneficiaries, people are prioritised in multi-level governance.

Collaborative governance raises the voices of people individually or collectively to influence the decision-making that impacts their lives. Strong public institutions maintain law and order in the country and will keep an eye on the government's performance in providing services to the people and development (Meyer, 2018). Accountability is a key to good governance, in which people's vigilance and participation are centralised on the activities of the governments (Khotami, 2017). Hufty (2011b) proposed five indicators to measure governance through the Governance Analytical Framework: "problems, social norms, actors, nodal points and processes" (p. 407). Problems include the issues, social norms are the rules and regulations, actors represent the stakeholders, nodal points are the spaces for interactions, and processes include decision-making activities. Oliveira et al. (2022), in their research about education governance, mentioned the social norms refer to the "collective expectations about what is considered appropriate behaviour in a society to provide for power, regulation, competences, accountability, legitimacy or sanctions to actors in the governance process" (p. 10). The literature (Meyer, 2018, Khotami, 2017; Hufty, 2011b; Oliveira et al, 2022) has stressed that people and their social values are essential determinants in the governance that impacts their lives.

2.2.3 School Governance

A school is managed and governed by the engagement of multiple stakeholders who oversee the technical and administrative aspects of governing a school. On the other hand, Halász, 2003, as cited in Bäckman and Trafford (2007), highlighted that school governance is more associated with the school as an educational system as schools are the elements of social and political dynamics in a particular context.

Sound school governance is a current educational issue worldwide, and Crouch and Winkler (2008) highlighted that developing countries have increased access to basic education and that funding for education has increased. However, the citizens of these countries are lagging behind in the quality of education received. Crouch and Winkler (2008) maintained that the poor performance of academic institutions was due to the weak governance system of the educational institutes. In this context, Bäckman and Trafford (2007) prioritised democratic school governance in which "school governance is based on human right values, empowerment and involvement of students, staff and stakeholders in all important decisions in the school" (p. 9). They further stated that a school with democratic governance has less risk of conflict amongst its stakeholders because they can present their views openly and with mutual respect. Hofman et al. (2002) found that high community values among school managers, teachers, parents and locals will develop the school environment in such a way that it enhances students' learning achievements. A collaborative approach in school governance is synonymous with good governance of schools.

2.2.4 School Governance in Nepal

In Nepal, good governance became popularised after the democratic movement in 1990 when political power was devolved to a people's government, and democracy was a key mantra of the state in order to provide development and justice to the people (Subedi & Subedi, 2021). The 2008 Nepal Good Governance Act defined the fundamental values of good governance as "the rule of law, corruption-free and smart administration, financial discipline, and efficient management of public work" (Nepal Law Commission, 2008, p. 1). These initiatives aimed to deliver government services to the people and to create a welfare state (Lamichhane, 2021).

After the 1990 democracy, Nepal received financial and policy reform-related support from other countries. In 1999, Nepal brought in the Local Self Governance Act, which gives enormous rights to local bodies in deciding and implementing development plans through a participatory development approach (Government of Nepal, 1999). The 2002 Tenth Periodic plan highlighted that good governance could lead to poverty alleviation if there was a joint effort of the private sector, public sector, NGOs, and civil societies in the social and economic transformation of the country (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2002). Due to the influence of democratic transformation and introduction of participatory development approaches in 1990, the 1971 Education Act was amended in 2001. The amendment introduced School Management Committees by engaging parents and communities in school governance (Nepal Law Commission, 2001). The decentralisation of education management to communities aimed to generate local ownership in taking care of schools and to provide local support to school administrators (Nepal Ministry of Education and Sports, 2003). A SMC includes local stakeholders such as parents, communities, social activities, elected representatives, teachers and Head Teachers in the school governance process (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b). The SMC model, due to the value of community in Nepali culture, has been able to adopt a collaborative and democratic approach, which has made school governance the best example of participatory governance (see Laurent-Olive & Bourn, 2020).

A SMC in a Nepali public school operates, manages, and supervises all school activities related to teaching, learning and administrative management (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b). The SMC model has been in operation across all public schools in the country for two decades; however, public education is always blamed for producing poor academic outcomes (Koirala, 2015b; Nepal Ministry of Education, 2020b, 2021; Neupane, 2019; Parajuli & Das, 2013; Shrestha, 2014; Thapa, 2015). Public school problems are broader than funding because the government's annual education budget is on an increasing trend (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2014, 2015, 2016a, 2017). The 2020 Fifteenth Periodic Plan identified “enhancing good governance and accountability” as one of the challenges for public education (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2020a, p. 229), so effective school governance is important to reversing the deteriorating public education in the country.

Several other research studies have mentioned that weak school governance causes poor quality of education in public schools. Khadka (2021)'s research on the effect of governance on education performance in Nepal found that the country has weak performance because the Government is incapable of providing effective education-related service delivery and has implemented plans and policies that hamper sound school governance. Parajuli (2007) claimed that the SMC model in Nepal was a donor agenda and that there was low public participation in school governance due to a lack of management ideas. Carney et al. (2007) blamed SMCs for representing local elite groups who prioritised the surveillance of teachers and restricted teacher independence and autonomy. Pherali (2012) also raised similar distrust concerns regarding the ordinary people's involvement in the SMCs in Nepal; he claimed that SMC gatherings are more focused on keeping an eye on the financial issues of schools rather than improving academic achievement. In addition, the agendas in the SMC meetings are generally non-academic and the members are motivated to participate if they can receive economic benefits and increased status (Pherali, 2012).

Laurent-Olive and Bourn (2020) pointed out that the SMC model has compulsory female participation; however, there is no compulsory representation of ethnic communities, which means that all voices cannot be heard in school governance. They viewed that Nepali education culture is guided by a “west is best” mentality and lacks localness (p. 13). The view of flawed school governance in Nepal is supported by Rajbhandari (2016), who argues that public schools in Nepal are turning into poor wo/men's schools. Despite free education in public schools, parents choose private schools because of the deteriorating learning environments in the public schools. He has asserted that the school leadership through SMC is not very effective as most chairpersons are non-academic and have little experience in administrative management. Baral (2013) claimed that community schools are turning into 'girls' schools' as parents enrol their sons into private schools that provide a good education. A. R. Bhattarai (2022) found that the government does not consult with local stakeholders, such as schools and SMCs, when implementing school policies. This inferior practice is creating a duality in education in Nepal and has introduced a different form of gender discrimination. Khanal and Timilsena (2022) and Hamal (2020) stated that the central government in Nepal is always reluctant to share education-related power to local bodies because of a hierarchical mindset and political

motives. Khanal and Ghimire (2022) found that Head Teachers are unable to make autonomous decisions for a school's welfare as they are under constant work-related pressure from the SMCs.

Research shows that private schools in Nepal have outperformed public schools in terms of quality education (Adhikari & Pasa, 2021; Adhikari & Aryal, 2020; Koirala, 2015b; Nepal Ministry of Education, 2021; Thapa, 2015). Entrepreneurs govern private schools, while public schools are under the care of communities and the government. Educational quality differences between public and private schools indicate that people's participation in public schools has been unable to improve school governance. There is much research to show that people's participation in any development effort is aimed at delivering positive changes to their lives and livelihood (Adekola, 2011; Baxter et al., 2020; Haldane et al., 2019; Khanal & Ghimire, 2022; Mia et al., 2022; Soithong, 2022; Sopchokcha, 1996; Tajudin et al., 2019; Toogood, 2015; Ugwu & Aruma, 2019). However, participatory school governance in Nepal is different as people's effort has been unable to improve the quality of education, which directly impacts their lives. Consequently, community involvement in public school governance in Nepal is a matter for research.

The 2015 Constitution handed the accountability of public schools to local governments, which was previously assessed by the Central education ministry (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016b). Nepal is in a federal transition stage during which political authority has been devolved to 753 local government units. This stage demands there is regulatory capacity for local governments to govern schools, institutionalise decentralisation, and promote quality education (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2021). Equally, the 2019 National Education Policy has identified the role of the community to make school plans, manage resources, develop a local curriculum, and monitor, supervise, and conduct school exams for basic level⁴ students (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2019). These political advancements and the meaning of governance in Nepali education acknowledges the inclusion of local stakeholders for its smooth functioning. Research on school governance in Nepal has been focused on the lapses in governance and its role in deteriorating educational quality (Baral, 2013; A. R. Bhattarai, 2022; Carney et al., 2007; Hamal, 2020; Khadka, 2021; Khanal & Timilsena, 2022; Khanal & Ghimire, 2022;

⁴ Grades one through eight

Laurent-Olive & Bourn, 2020; Parajuli, 2007; Pherali, 2012; Rajbhandari, 2016). Gisselquist (2012) took the discussion further by maintaining that “how to improve governance?” is not significantly important unless “how to improve what exactly?” is identified (p .22). There is limited research to show how Nepali school governance is constituted in the context of people’s local values and political influences, so this is another research opportunity. The review that follows next examines the involvement of local communities alongside the historical development of school education in Nepal.

2.3 Review on Schooling Education from Past to Present: Situating Communities

The following literature review on the historical development of education in Nepal locate the importance of community values. I present the roles and engagements of communities in five stages of the country’s educational history. The first is the Ancient Education System (pre-Rana period), during which the education system followed Hindu cultural practices. The second is the Rana regime from 1846 to 1951, when modern education began. The third is the Panchayat Period from 1961-1990, during which legislative reforms in education started. The fourth is the democratic and education decentralisation period from 1991 to 2014. During this period, the SMC model was initiated across all public schools, the education system became liberal, and the country started receiving global support. The fifth is the period after the implementation of the 2015 Constitution until 2022. In these periods, Nepal adopted both centralisation and decentralisation approaches of school governance (Khanal, 2013a).

Stage One: Ancient Education System

Due to the high respect of the rulers towards the *Vedic*⁵ knowledge system, formal educational practices in ancient Nepal were dominated by Aryan-Sanskritic influences. Aryan scholastic institutions like *Gurukuls* flourished during this period (Pandey et al., 1956). Gurukuls were teachers' homes where the parents sent their sons to gain scholarly knowledge and lifelong skills (Sitholey et al., 2013). Gurus are highly prestigious and similar to the gods in Hindu societies (Rigopoulos, 2018). In Hinduism, education is symbolically the tool that liberates humans from their miserable lives (Mukherjee, 2015), and this ultimate transcendence to divine consciousness is achieved through the blessings of gurus. For these

⁵ From the ancient writings of Vedas, with religious ideas and practices

reasons, cultural-educational institutions flourished in ancient times. There were no formal schools and learners had to stay at gurukuls and serve the gurus. This cultural schooling process was common in communities, and this scenario supports that “communities are the place where the education system gets evolved” in Nepal (Dhungel et al., 2013, p. 31).

Stage Two: Rana Rule in Nepal—1846 to 1951

Nepal had an autocratic Rana rule for 104 years until 1951. The Ranas did not favour educated citizens because they perceived that educated people would revolt against their absolute power (Bhatta & Mehendale, 2019). In 1853, the first school was established to educate the sons of the rulers and their patrons, but not the general population (Sharma, 1990). Ordinary citizens were allowed to open schools after the 1940s because of the political situation in neighbouring India. During this period, many schools were opened in India as a part of people's agitation against the British (Shrestha, 2014) who had ruled and administratively colonised India for almost a century. This wave of opening schools in India entered Nepal, so the Ranas relaxed their policies and let the communities fund and open schools. Communities started making school buildings, arranging for teachers, collecting student fees, collecting donations, and managing all educational and administrative activities continued until 1971 (Shrestha, 2014). The community's role in opening schools was initiative- and needs-based for their children to improve their lives (Nepal Research Center for Educational Innovation and Development, 2009). Education was poorly developed during the Rana regime, and the literacy rate in the country until 1951 was below 1 per cent (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2017b). Indeed, it was beyond the imagination of ordinary people to have their children gain admission due to the low numbers of schools opened. The state policies and social practices did not favour the growth of schools in Nepal “as education was seen as the threat to the power of the ruling party” (Akpov et al., 2018, p. 204). The community's involvement as a stake in school governance was impossible, although, to a small extent, communities put their best efforts into opening schools at the end of the Rana regime.

Stage Three: Panchayat Rule in Nepal—1951 to 1990

After the Rana regime's downfall in 1951, communities were more involved in opening schools for their children (Sharma, 2008). People participated in constructing schools by donating money, physical labour, and ideas (Pradhan et al., 2019). Schools were not the priority of the then rulers as the government's outreach to communities was very unusual (Pradhan et al., 2019; Shrestha, 2003); however, communities were proactive in establishing and managing schools. Unfortunately, there was again an autocratic ruler, the King, whose Panchayat reign lasted from 1961-1990. Panchayat nationalised all schools in 1971, and these schools came under the direct control of the government (Nepal Ministry of Education, 1971; Poudyal, 2013) whose bureaucrats delimited the roles of communities. Panchayat claimed that it was introducing a new education system in the country by bringing schools from the control of the public to the state. However, this change did not produce positive outcomes as it resulted “unsustainable financial burden increased on the education sector and public participation was almost obliterated” (Nepal National Planning Commission, 1992, p. 10). The bureaucracy-controlled schools did not advance the educational outcomes in the country (Nepal National Education Commission, 1992). Dhungel et al. (2013) blamed the school's power centralisation by the central government for the widening gap between government and school communities. By the end of the Panchayat rule in 1991, 61 percent of people were illiterate (Nepal National Planning Commission, 1992). This literacy data shows the slow education growth rate during Panchayat rule as the global illiteracy rate was already down to 34.2 per cent in 1970 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017). However, community involvement in schools was almost ignored in the Panchayat regime.

Stage Four: After Panchayat Rule—1990 to 2014

After the fall of Panchayat in 1990, educational reform programs started in the Nepal (Kharel, 2017). Khanal (2013a) mentioned that this transformation was mainly due to two reasons. The first was the desire of people to realise change after gaining democracy after 30 years of the Panchayat autocracy, and the second was the country's commitment toward global educational development goals such as Education for All. Khanal (2013a) coined this change in Nepali education as achieving “democracy and modernity” (p. 64). The 1992 Report of the National Education Commission mentioned that “the inspection system has to

be rebuilt from the bottom up if it is to play its proper role in the quality improvement of national education” (Nepal National Education Commission, 1992, p. 70). This plan envisaged including local stakeholders in school governance and prioritising communities. Gradually, Nepal received the overwhelming support of global countries to launch programs such as the Basic and Primary Education Master Plan (BPEP I: 1992-1997 and BPEP II: 1997-2002). BPEP II identified the necessity of community-engaged SMCs for efficient management, resource mobilisation, and local support to schools. This plan also suggested "stop all political appointments and nominations" in SMCs (Nepal Ministry of Education, 1997). As a significant political achievement, the country introduced the 1999 Local Self Governance Act to ensure the participation of people and communities in local development initiatives (Dhungel et al., 2011). In 2001, the country adopted the 2001-2015 Education for All plan with the assistance of global donors. The plan highlighted education decentralisation as a critical tool to enhance school management by mobilising communities (Nepal Ministry of Education and Sports, 2003). These political changes in the country resulted in the seventh amendment to the 1971 Education Act in 2001, which involved communities and parents as active members of the School Management Committees (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b). The political advancements after the 1990s in local and global contexts laid the foundation to bringing parents and communities back to schools. The SMC model suggested it was best if parents and communities managed, operated and supervised the schools.

However, in the period 1990-2014, two historical political processes hampered the growth of education in Nepal. One was the decade-long armed conflict, which ended in 2006, between the Government and the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist. The Maoist revolution was against the status quo of social and economic development and the feudalistic structures within society, and Maoists suggested that educational deficiencies were a significant hindrance to societal change (Pherali, 2011). During this period of conflict, the efforts and resources of the government were concentrated on settling the dispute with the Maoist. The second was the political vacuum operating at local levels of government from 2002 to 2016, which meant local bodies did not have elections during this period (Chetri, 2017). Due to the absence of locally elected representatives, the decentralised development plans of government could not be institutionalised at local levels (Nepal

National Planning Commission, 2002). Despite these political crises, communities' involvement in the school governance system continued to sustain schooling education through the SMCs.

Stage Five: Post the 2015 Constitution

As a new initiative, the 2015 Constitution delegated school management to local governments (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2021; Nepal Ministry of Law, 2015), and since then local governments have been preparing their own local education acts to devise educational policies that suit their needs and contexts (Democracy Resource Center Nepal, 2020). Local governments have pivoting roles in the preparation and implementation of local schooling curriculum (Gurung & Parajuli, 2021), and it seems that local governance in schooling education has been gradually institutionalised after the promulgation of the 2015 Constitution. The community-driven SMC model still functions across the country to provide local guardianship of schooling education. It looks like local governments and local communities are contributing to school governance based on their authority and influence. In this changed educational context, there is a research opportunity to explore the roles of communities in school governance.

2.3.1 Communities' Legacy in School Governance in the Present Context

The legacy of community in school governance in the present context is a research limitation in Nepali education. As detailed above, with 1846 as the point of departure, Nepal witnessed different political regimes and transformations, such as the Rana regime for 104 years, the Panchayat regime for 30 years, armed Maoist conflict for ten years, and no local elections for 15 years. Past research and education policy documents in Nepal centralises local communities as permanent institutions in establishing and managing schools in all political environments (Dhungel et al., 2013; Nepal Research Center for Educational Innovation and Development, 2009; Pradhan et al., 2019; Shrestha, 2014). The 2015 Constitution delegated significant responsibility of school governance and management to local governments, which includes 753 political units (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2015), and the 2016 School Sector Development Plan included a provision that the SMCs led by elected representatives will be responsible for ensuring the quality of education and sound school management (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016b). However, the 2019 National Education Policy mentioned that SMCs in public schools have to be reformed as a supportive body to

local governments in school management (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2019). This legislation developed after 2015 seems to have minimised the roles of communities in the SMCs; now elected representatives of local governments, who are political party cadres, lead the SMCs. It has been seven years since the promulgation of the 2015 Constitution, and the changes in the education system regarding education decentralisation, are yet to be operationalised. In this changed political context, there needs to be more research about continuity of the community's legacy in schooling education.

2.3.2 Cultural Values in School Governance

The continuity of cultural values in school governance in Nepal is another opportunity of research. The political advancements after 2006 overthrew the 240 years old monarchy and declared the nation secular. The 2015 Constitution has elaborated secularity as cultural and religious freedom in the country (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2015). There are scholarly debates which claim Hindu dharma is a threat and hegemonic to religious diversity in Nepal, and this dharma suppresses religious and ethnic minorities (see Cailmail, 2008; Grossman-Thompson, 2017; Pariyar & Lovett, 2016; Upadhyaya, 2011). However, Hindu socio-cultural values are embedded in the lives of the Nepali people, and a community is always shaped by its norms, values and culture (Williams, 2004).

Nepali communities are culturally built to engage in schools in a philanthropic manner and collectively. In Eastern philosophy, the Hindu holy book Gita says, '*Karmanye vadhikaraste ma phaleshu kadachan*'. This verse means to work without expecting desires (Gangadharrao, 2014). This teaching of the Gita inspires people to work selflessly in social activities that will benefit all. Karma encourages humans to follow the path of morals and do good for others (Atkinson, 2010). Similarly, the holy doctrine Veda says, '*Sarve bhabantu sukihna*'. This verse from Vedas means 'may all be happy' (Dhal & Roy, 2021). Likewise, '*Vasubaidha kutumbakam*'—This verse from Maha Upanisad means 'whole cosmos is a family' (Rautaray et al., 2022). The substantial value of Nepali people is the community itself (Bista, 1991, as cited in Laurent-Olive & Bourn, 2020), and the community's help to schools has advanced due to people's value system. These cultural teachings inspire people to live together and to be happy in all social environments. However, as indicated above, political decisions have changed the country's Hindu identity into a secular nation. In this socio-

political context, there is a research opportunity to explore the position of Hindu cultural values in school governance in Nepal.

2.3.3 Beyond Local Strength in School Education: The Next Story

Despite local values being pivotal in the foundation and shaping of Nepali education, there are many problems in the country's public schooling education. The latest educational figures claim that the quality of public education has dropped significantly. In the fiscal year 2020/21, there were 27,813 public schools, and in 2021/22, this number declined to 26,454 (Nepal Ministry of Finance, 2021, 2022). The 2022 Economic Survey report by the Nepal ministry of Finance claims that the number decreased due to the closure and merger of the public schools which had not been sustainably operated. Government reports, such as the 2021 Nepal Education Sector Analysis and the 2019 National Assessment of Student Achievement, indicate that public school students have poor learning outcomes (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2020b, 2021), and research shows that in public schools there is prevalence of poor educational delivery, low pass and high dropout rates, and inefficient management structures (Koirala, 2015b; Neupane, 2019; Parajuli & Das, 2013; Shrestha, 2014; Thapa, 2015). This poor educational scenario indicates that public education needs massive reforms and that the strengths of local communities are insufficient to cope with diverse educational needs and priorities. The following review focuses on the role of politics in facilitating the collaboration of school managers and local stakeholders in promoting Nepali school governance.

2.4 Review of Politics and its roles in School Education

Politics can be viewed from two perspectives: the art of government and the exercise of power. Firstly, Coby (1986) suggested that politics is the art in which government provides service to people and enforces law and order for their welfare. Osieja (2021) stated that politics means the administration of public services whose focus is to distribute resources to citizens. This administration is necessary because of the limited availability of resources for the growing population. Political parties that win the people's trust through democratic elections have the power to provide service and development to people. These parties get fixed term mandate from public through the elections. These are the narrow

views of politics from the perspectives of the art of government by political parties, bureaucracy, and politicians (Modebadze, 2010).

Secondly, Osieja added that politics is related to power relations—Politics bestows the "capacity to influence others" (p. 4). For example, this power can be economic, military, and knowledge. As social actors exercise politics, so politics exists everywhere where there are human interactions, debates, and problem-solving of societal issues. It is related to power relations that give the ability to achieve desired outcomes (Modebadze, 2010). Jackson and Tansey (2014) also supported that politics is an exercise of power by people in society. Political power is not confined to one person or institution but is exercised throughout the social system (Foucault, 1995). Eijk (2018) added that "politics is present in all situations where interactions between people are structured by differences in power, authority, and control" (p. 10). Politics extends beyond the roles of government, as it is connected to the everyday life experiences in societies and economies, and the roles of international countries (Warren, 1999).

These two interpretations of politics signal that politics is connected with power that aims to rule people through structured mechanisms such as governments, and the power that fuels and leads the social debates on transformations and developments. This supports the claim of Eijk (2018) that "not everything is political, but politics is everywhere" (p. 10). Politics is omnipresent and well-situated in Nepali school governance as it engages multiple stakeholders—communities, parents, local governments, bureaucrats, and women representatives through the SMCs. These stakeholders use their political power and positions to influence decision-making in schools.

2.4.1 Politics: Is it Better for Macro-Level Educational Reforms?

In Nepal, politics is termed *Raajjnit*, which means the master of all policies. Politics is a playmaker in the Nepali education system because every political regime imposes its visions and policies to improve people's socio-economic lives, including education (Poudyal, 2013). A Nepal Government report supports that "Education systems are part of the political process" (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2021, p. 125). Politics triggers the debates on positive social transformations and facilitates bringing legislations for people's welfare.

There are some examples that show the transformative roles of politics in school governance. In 2001, the seventh amendment of the 1971 Education Act included locals and

parents, with compulsory female participation, in the SMCs (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b). In 2006, political parties in Nepal overthrew the 240 years old Hindu-monarchy in Nepal and transformed the country into a secular republican nation (Hachhethu, 2007). The result was the 2015 Constitution, which redistributed political power from the central administration to the seven provincial and 753 local governments (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2015). The 2015 Constitution includes the political decision to devolve administration of school education to local governments, and this provision induced reforms in the education system through decentralised school governance. The constitution further stated that schooling education should be provided for free, which aligns with the country's socialism-oriented principles (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2015). The policies were developed for the local context and sought to include women in the SMCs, increase educational decentralisation, and provide free schooling education. This indicates that politics has provided significant structural reforms to the education system in Nepal.

Apart from inducing these macro-level affirmative roles, politics is blamed for influencing negative impacts on school education in Nepal. Politics is more associated with power relations (Fadakinte, 2019), and public schools in Nepal are soft targets for exercising power plays. The political influence on Nepal's education sector grew after democracy was instituted in 1991, and politics flourished through the SMCs (Sharma, 2008). Political parties aim to govern the local politics by using public school platforms through the SMCs and teachers' unions (Dharel et al., 2013; Pherali, 2012), the latter being politically motivated and lobby on behalf the agendas of their mother parties instead of using politics for the professional growth of teachers and the welfare of schools (Kharel, 2017; Poudyal, 2015; United Nations Children's Fund, 2017). Teachers' political role has hampered the delivery of quality education, as "power sharing" prevails among teachers' unions and political parties (Khanal, 2010, p. 155). Teachers are professionally compelled to join a political trade union that represent their power and identity (Neupane et al., 2018), so Head Teachers feel continuous pressure from politically-motivated personnel (Khanal & Ghimire, 2022). Furthermore, disinterest and delays caused by political leaders pushed back the filling of the vacancies of thousands of teachers for years (Ghimire, 2021, February 7). The country is unable to prepare the Federal Education Act until the sixth year of the new constitution as it requires a broad political consensus (Dhungana et al., 2021). Politics has created a tense

environment for school education, directly impacting on sound school governance, so there is a growing mass expectation that schools have to be developed as purely educational institutions with no influence from political parties.

Political values are almost inseparable from schooling education in the Nepali context. Politics is dominantly visible in making educational policies that represent the political visions of the rulers. The 2015 Constitution in Nepal is the best example of how political agreement has supported the decentralisation model in school governance through the local governments. Politics act as a collaborative agency to reform public schools; however, there is a dominance of negative connotations of politics in school education. Scholars viewed that party politics has converted schools into power centres, lowered educational outputs, and induced partisanship in school governance structures (Dharel et al., 2013; Dhungana et al., 2021; Kharel, 2017; Pherali, 2012; United Nations Children's Fund, 2017). In these debates, there has been little research on the positive roles of politics from the perspectives of community engagement and local government's leadership roles in schools. On the other hand, there could be some other interesting areas that politics has badly impacted the school governance system. These understandings about politics in school governance motivated me to explore the influence of politics in shaping group and community involvement in school governance.

Further, I experienced that in public schools, school stakeholders exercise political authority by bringing in funds from national and international donors. Next part of the review concerns the politics of foreign aid in Nepal.

2.4.2 Politics of Foreign Aid: Donors' Roles in Education in Nepal

Foreign aid is crucial in the Nepali educational sector (Dangal, 2013). After the democratic movement in 1990, different educational initiatives began in the country (Kharel, 2017). The Government prepared the 1991-2001 Master Plan for Basic and Primary Education, which was supported by donors including Denmark, Norway, Finland, the World Bank, and the European Union (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004; Nepal Ministry of Education, 1997). Afterwards, the 2001-2015 Education for All Plan was developed, which attracted a large number of donors (Nepal Ministry of Education and Sports, 2003). Then the 2003-2008 Community Schools Support Project was initiated with the support of the World Bank (The World Bank, 2010a). The 2009-2016 School Sector Reform Plan was funded by

international communities (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2009). The roles of donors was crucial in the 2016-2023 School Sector Development Plan (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016b; United Nations Children's Fund, 2017). In three decades after 1990, these donor-funded projects, plans, and programs that have contributed to uplifting several macro-level education indicators in the country. The literacy rate in the country during the Rana regime until 1951 was below 1 per cent (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2017b), but by the end of the Panchayat rule in 1991, 61 percent of Nepalis were illiterate (Nepal National Planning Commission, 1992). After 1990, the educational figures have positively elevated. The female literacy rate tripled from 1991 to 2011 (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2015b), and "The youth literacy rate among 15 to 24 years age-group [had] reached 92 per cent...the net enrolment rate of grades 1 to 5 [has] reached 97.2 per cent...[and the] school dropout rate remains 3.8 per cent in class[es] 1 to 5" (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2020a, p. 228). These achievements in education have assisted with reducing poverty in the country (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2021), and Nepal achieved good progress on the education component of the 2001-2015 United Nations Millennium Development Goals (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2016). In the country, education achievements are progressing toward achieving the 2016-2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which aim to provide quality education to all (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2020b). Donor communities have played a key role in advancements in the Nepali education system.

Despite these positive initiations by donors, there are some critical views regarding donor interests in Nepal. Aid to developing countries is not always generous but may be dependent on the lender countries' political and other interests (Salami, 2020). The World Bank is blamed for having the agenda of liberalism and trying to impose this political value on the borrower states (Mundy & Verger, 2015); for instance, the bank largely financed the Community Managed School Project in Nepal, which initiated the SMC model across the country (Carney et al., 2007). Similarly, donors' interventions have largely shaped educational values in Nepal through policy recommendations and large funding (Regmi, 2021a). Due to this, Nepali values such as diversity, culture, and occupations are considered hurdles to meeting global educational goals (Regmi, 2021b). Bhatta (2011) commented that the role of the Nepali government have been limited to managing the aid instead of leading the aid utilisation process, and donors are in the key positions to benefit from education

aids. Dahal (2021), in his research about education aid in Nepal, criticised the roles of donors in showing their “superiority syndrome” in developing nations (p. 9). Laurent-Olive and Bourn (2020) argued that the 'west is best' thought has dominated Nepali education, and this imposes western values in Nepali society.

The literature (Mundy & Verger, 2015; Salami, 2020) claims that foreign aid is a political tool for developed nations to impose ideologies such as capitalism on the borrower nations; similarly, Regmi (2015) criticised the World Bank's role in lobbying for the privatisation of education. The World Bank is a vital education development partner in Nepal and has financed the project of engaging communities through SMCs in public schools. This was done to decentralise school governance to local implementing bodies (The World Bank, 2010b). Although Nepal's government has welcomed foreign aid to support its development program, projects, and plans (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2020a), the constitution states that schooling education should be provided for free, which aligns with the country's socialism-oriented principle (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2015). In this situation, it is interesting to unpack the role of politics in bringing foreign aid to schools, how politics mediate the outcomes from donors' funding, and the consequences of foreign aid in school and community relations.

2.5 Signalling to the Theories and Methodology

While reviewing literature on Nepali school governance, I noted that policy documents dominated the discourse to define the meaning of and roles in school governance (see Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016b, 2019, 2021; Nepal Ministry of Law, 2015, 2017a, 2017b; Nepal Ministry of Law, 2020). The voices of school stakeholders, such as parents, locals, teachers, Head Teachers, elected representatives, and Education Officers, and their understanding and roles in school governance are generally missing in Nepali academic discourses. The narratives of lived experiences in supporting schools can be brought forward through their stories. Narrative inquiry is the relevant methodology I adopted to collect school stakeholders' understanding, perceptions and experiences, and to give meaning to my research (Barkhuizen, 2018).

Local values play a significant role in Nepali school governance, and these values are culturally and socially oriented. Localism theory helps to understand the roles of locals in the self-governance of local development affairs (Chaudhary, 2019). This theory can explain

school governance in Nepal, in which the community is primarily engaged. Eastern philosophy as a theoretical lens is helpful in enriching this discussion through the perspectives of Hindu cultural values.

Similarly, my research investigates how the influences of politics are associated with managerial reforms in public schools through the SMCs. New Public Management theory insists on making public service delivery efficient through economic and managerial lenses (Kearney & Hays, 1998). This theory helps to explain reforms in Nepali school governance through the perspective of the exercise of power amongst school stakeholders. Global governance theory helps enrich the discussion around the contribution and interests of donors in Nepali education.

2.6 Chapter Summary

The literature reviewed on social and cultural values of locals in Nepali society and the political influences in relation to school governance has determined the existing knowledge and research limitations that I can explore through this research. There are research opportunities regarding what constitutes Nepali school governance, community legacy in present educational governance, the position of Hindu cultural values in schools, the role of politics in shaping locals' involvement in schools, and political influences in mediating the outcomes from donors' funding in schools. The next chapter advances the conceptual framework of my study, where I have visualised my overall research journey through the interplay of theories, methodology, and methods.

Chapter Three

Conceptual Framework: Envisioning the Research Journey

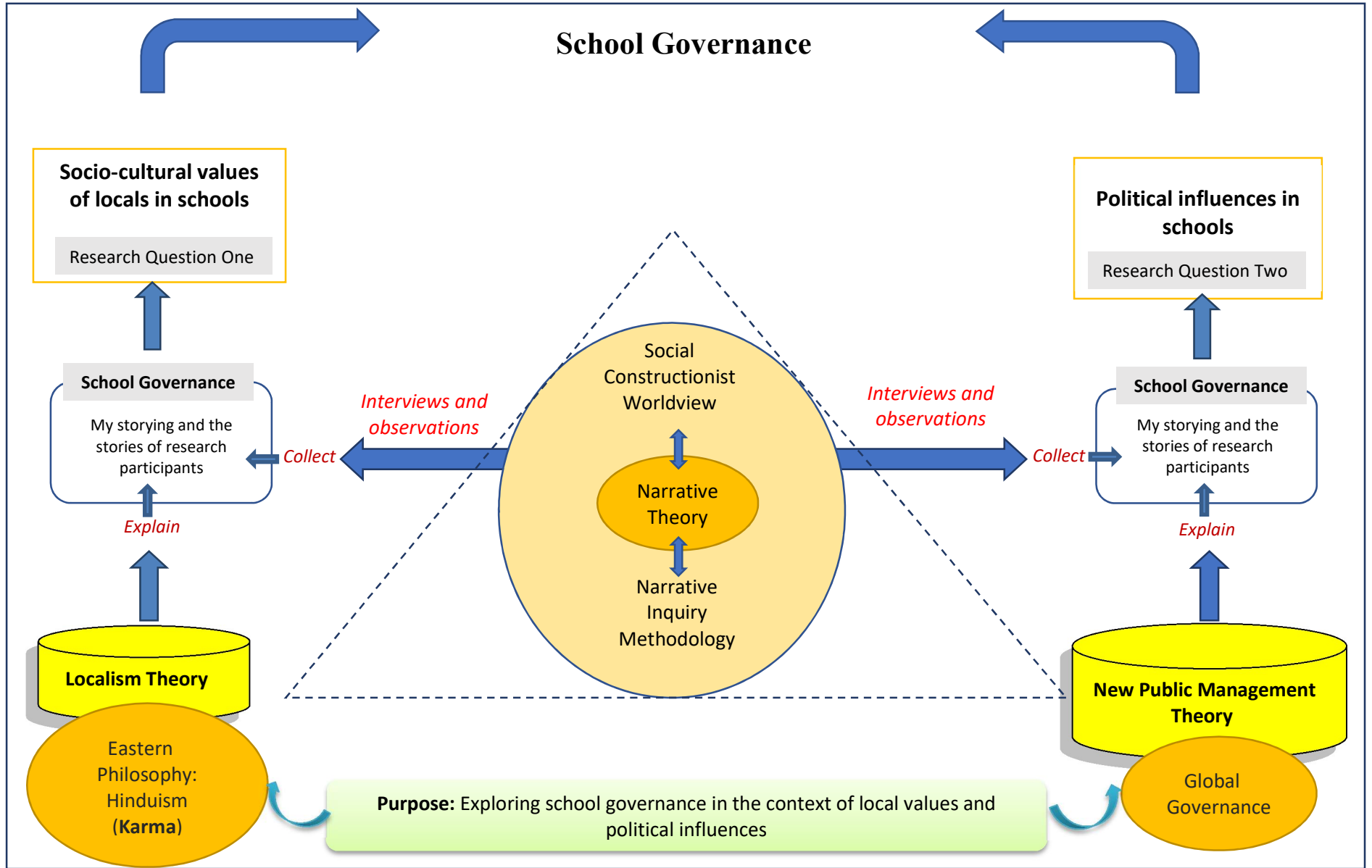
In this chapter, I present my conceptual framework [refer to Figure 5, p. 40] to visualise my research journey on school governance. This research framework shows the interplay between theories, narrative inquiry methodology, and research questions, through which I meet the purpose of the study in exploring school governance.

Initially, I introduce a model of my conceptual framework to show my research within a social constructionist worldview and narrative theory. The model signals narrative methods to collect stories from the field and theories to explain these findings. I explain my approach to narrative, narrative theory, and Hindu narratives, which are central to narrative inquiry methodology for this study. I detail how localism-Eastern Philosophy and the New Public Management- Global Governance theories help in explaining the narrative findings and developing meanings on school governance.

3.1 The Research's Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a researcher's craft that logically presents the purpose of a study, how the investigation is perceived through theoretical perspective, and what methodology and methods are used to answer the research questions (Kivunja, 2018). The following Figure 5 illustrates the conceptual framework of my research. At the base of the figure, I mention the purpose of my research which is to explore school governance in the context of local values and political influences. The purpose has advanced the illustrations of theories and methodology that I have applied in this research.

Figure 5 Conceptual Framework of my Research



In the conceptual framework [Figure 5], there are two blocks to represent theoretical concepts. The left-hand block is related to the people's local values, and the right-hand block details political influences in school governance. The theories mentioned in the conceptual framework were identified in Chapter Two's Literature Review. In the left-hand block, the theory of localism describes the teaming up of local stakeholders to enhance the governance of public schools' settings. These stakeholders, who are locals, parents, locally elected representatives, political leaders, and Education Officers, are culturally influenced by Hinduism to engage together in a school's development. Localism-Eastern philosophy theories will be used to explain the participant's statements about their social and cultural values of engaging in school governance. These explanations of local values will answer the first research question.

In the right-hand block, the theory of New Public Management explains how school structures such as SMCs, PTAs, Alumni, and others function in schools, their objectives, and how these perform for better school governance. The stories of participants related to political influence in schools are explained through the New Public Management reforms in Nepali education. In this context, Nepali public schools receive foreign aid for education development, so Global Governance theory explains donors' funding in Nepal's educational development. These explanations of political influences in school governance will answer the second research question.

In the conceptual framework, I have placed the social constructionism worldview, narrative theory, and narrative inquiry methodology at the centre of the research triangle. Social constructionism explains that people create their social reality through social and cultural interactions (Hansen, 2004). This construction of knowledge can be perceived through the narrative theory as a theoretical lens and can be explored through narrative inquiry as a methodology. Narrative is a common phenomenon in Hindu societies in order to share past cultural events in a storied way (Birkenholtz, 2019; Blommfield, 2016; Singh & Singh, 2013). This cultural scenario justifies my use of narrative theory to view the social world phenomena of my participants. I chose narrative inquiry as the methodology through which I collected the storied lived experiences of people, as a means of structuring and writing up my research processes

and findings. I used interviews and observations as methods to collect information from my participants who answered my research questions on school governance.

3.2 Social Constructionism as World View

A social constructionist worldview in academic research is a part of the postmodern theoretical movement (Hansen, 2004). Postmodernism as a movement began in the late twentieth century during the cold war period (Elaati, 2016). As an alternative to modernism, postmodernism maintains that urbanisation, technological development, and individualism are not the only end to development. Instead, human progress should encompass multiple realities and diversities of human lives (Kahraman, 2015). This means that social reality is not objective. Postmodernism further assumes that social knowledge is relative to temporal context and cultural phenomena, and needs exploration to understand its meaning (Holtz, 2020). Postmodernism identifies “the rise of the east and decline of the west—economically and philosophically” (Peters et al., 2022, p. 327). Western technological advancements and discoveries are insufficient to reveal the meaning of knowledge and truth associated with human lives. The postmodernism movement brought a philosophical wave to disjuncture older beliefs, such as the west is best, knowledge is objective, and the dominance of a single culture (Peters et al., 2022). The movement believes there is no single reality, and realities exist in multiple perspectives that must be explored and interpreted (Nath, 2014).

A socially constructed worldview rejects modernist thinking of a single truth (Andrews, 2012). It accepts multiple realities which humans generate through relations and social interactions (Flaskas, 1995; Galbin, 2014; Hansen, 2004). Klostermann and Forstadt (2016) argued that the knowledge development process in a society is the by-product of cultural interactions among individuals. They further claimed that the behavioural development of humans is nurtured over time as they interact with other individuals. Human beings create their world, ways of living, and thinking to perceive social realities collaboratively (Alford, 2012). The interactions between humans and their co-created knowledge help researchers understand people and their world.

In my research, I chose the social constructionist worldview to guide my research phenomena and research journey. I explored school governance through the lived experiences of local stakeholders in Lalitpur. In Nepali societies, school-community relationships are very cordial as communities in the past established many schools, and community engagement in school development is still visible and in practice (Pradhan et al., 2019). In my experience, people address public schools as 'our schools', and they act selflessly to help these schools. People have created a local knowledge system that engages them to manage and run the schools, and to achieve the best educational outcomes.

In my research, I use subjective reality to understand local stakeholders' engagement in Lalitpur schools. As a Hindu man, I perceive that each school stakeholder, such as SMC members—parents, teachers, local politicians, and Education Officers—has values obtained from their religions, culture, and community interactions; in other words, their socio-cultural milieu. The diverse experiences of research participants embody their multiple realities of life stories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), and such stories are helpful tools for me to understand and explore the social realities of my participants.

3.3 Narrative and Narrative Theory

Stories are the medium to share human experiences (Berry, 2016). Narrative is the telling of people's life events by crafting these into a resonant thread of stories to give a sensible meaning to understand their lived experiences (Huber et al., 2018). A narrator shares people's experiences by situating the self in these stories (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). Every human life is full of stories which can be expressed through narrative.

Broadly, narrative is a theoretical lens to perceive social world phenomena through stories (Wang & Geale, 2015). Social realities and voices are reflected in human stories (Moen, 2006), and these stories carry the lived experiences that embody people, culture and generations, and carry unique meanings to different people and contexts (Gurney, 2022). Narratives construct social knowledge because the researcher and participants interact and build new knowledge relevant to that time and context (Caine et al., 2018). Eventually, this knowledge of people gets established in a society and is passed to a new generation as an essential asset of their value system (Smith, 2013). This role of narratives highlights its

importance as a theory that prioritises human stories to understand lived experiences. This theoretical lens of narrative differs according to people, culture, and geographies.

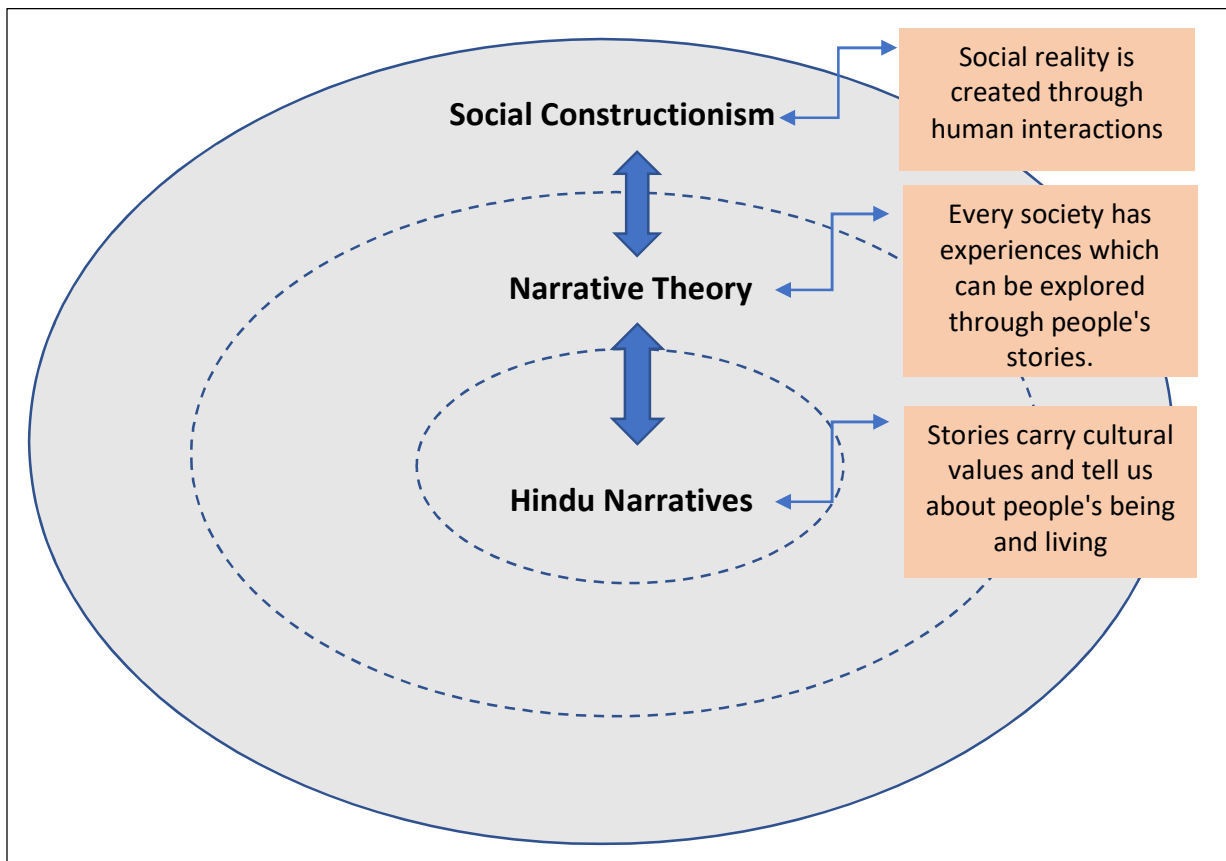
3.3.1 Hindu Narratives

Holy documents in eastern societies are enriched with narrative writings. In Nepal, Hinduism and Buddhism are major religions that have enriched society with different holy texts. Vedas are the moral doctrines in Hinduism, and these were written 5000 years ago. These doctrines were orally passed from generation to generation in dialogue or narrative form (Blommfield, 2016). Vedas inspire human societies to be enriched with knowledge, follow the path of good Karma, and live consciously with a pure mind (Kaphle et al., 2020). The teachings of Vedas are still pertinent and lively in Hindu societies because these have been passed on as narratives from generation to generation (Valdez, 2015). Swasthani Katha is a Hindu tale recited annually for a month in Hindu Nepali houses. This tale contains the stories of female strength, womanhood, and the unconditional love of husband and wife (Birkenholtz, 2019). The ancient Hindu tales Mahabharat and Ramayana are the holy epics in Nepal. The Mahabharat contains stories on power scuffles amongst heirs over the country's authority and control (Pallathadka & Pallathadka, 2020). The Bhagavat Gita is part of the Mahabharata. Gita is a poetic narrative that includes the teachings of Karma, self-realisation, wisdom, and bravery (Ghimire, 2013). Ramayana is the story of Lord Ram and his defeat of the demon Ravana, and this story symbolises the victory of truth and virtue (Singh & Singh, 2013). Lord Buddha, whose teachings were based on storytelling, is the founder of Buddhism (Das, 2015). The 2500-year-old teachings of Buddha are still practised in Nepali societies (Kyokai, 2019), where Buddha's teachings help to achieve mental wellness through the realisation of human sufferings and their overcoming (Aich, 2013).

The above examples indicate that Nepali societies have a long tradition of passing the ancient knowledge systems to succeeding generation through stories. Narrative allegory is common in Nepal because narrative is well-situated in the country's culture through religion. People find stories to understand and express human experiences. Their cultural traditions have shaped their values to encourage them to work for mass welfare; for instance, working together and collectively for education development. These traditional values of Hinduism are

still adopted today as moral codes of conduct. These cultural reminiscences of people’s lives can be explored through their stories. Overall, the discussions on social constructionist worldview, narrative theory, and Hindu narratives guide me to use the narrative inquiry as a methodology in my research, which I discuss in Chapter Four. Figure 6 shows my research's connections between a social constructionist worldview, narrative theory, and Hindu narratives.

Figure 6 *Research's Worldview*



In Figure 6, social constructionist worldview maintains that people construct social realities through mutual engagements in social activities. Narrative is a theoretical lens through which human stories help me to understand the cultural framing in Nepali societies, explore the interactions of people, and obtain information related to school governance. Hindu narratives are evident in how stories represent cultural values and how these traditional values have shaped today's Nepali societies, including community-managed school governance.

In the following section I review the theories: Localism, Eastern Philosophy, New Public Management, and Global governance. These theories are important to my thesis because these assist in conceptualising my research's framework and these theories support answering the research questions [refer to Figure 5, p. 40].

3.4 Localism Theory

Localism stands for centralising the roles of locals in shaping their lives for the better. The top-down development policies that aim to bring about social and economic reforms have generally failed in developing countries such as Nepal (Limbu, 2019). Nepal acknowledges the mobilisation of local human capital and invests in a community-centred development approach to make people's lives better (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2020c). There are different views on perceiving localism, such as synergising local strength in community works (Kurland et al., 2012), rights and representation of local stakeholders (Smith, 1985, as cited in Elander, 1997), as an element of multi-level governance (Harmes, 2021), and a practice in decentralisation (Madanipour & Davoudi, 2015). Localism aims to shift political power to locals thus ensuring their decisive roles in the development process.

Localism stresses collaboration between locals and other actors to get optimum benefits from the development process (Kurland et al., 2012). There is a misconception that the agenda of localism becomes strong when central politics and bureaucracy are weak in the overarching development of local bodies (Mohan & Stokke, 2000). This conception cannot help local units in the human development process. Mohan and Stokke mentioned "The relationship between the state and society can be characterised by strategic engagement or disengagement, but the image of the state and society as discrete spheres cannot be sustained" (p. 264). So there needs to be a collaborative approach to development. Mansuri and Rao (2012) have elaborated that community development becomes effective and result-oriented if both central state and local initiatives participate.

Localism supports the democratic rights of every citizen through their participatory and meaningful engagement in social affairs. Local democracy is essential to maintaining the values of equality amongst citizens and their engagement in shaping their future. Localism helps to ensure freedom from undue control and dictatorship (Smith, 1985, as cited in Elander, 1997); it

flourishes through the social capital of people who share common values and norms. Their networking and we-feeling develop bonds that are always pro local development works. Meaningful participation of people can be ensured through their shared values (Holman & Rydin, 2013). In addition, Painter et al. (2011) suggested that localism is helpful to community empowerment if it adopts specific criteria based on local initiatives considered to be policy priorities by all levels of government, devolving power and authority to the lower level of governments, appropriate legal provisioning to support decentralised governance, and promoting community leaderships. People's representation and rights are always at the core of localism, and if these align with national priorities then development occurs.

Localism has come to be seen as a critique of globalisation [refer to Global Governance p. 55, for meaning of globalisation]. The one-size fits all tendency of globalisation is challenged by the ideas of localism as the latter acknowledges diverse local realities (Asay, 2019; Park, 2019). In this context, localism is explained through the theory of governance in which the roles of the bottom stakeholders, who are both implementers and beneficiaries, are prioritised. This focus on multi-level governance is relevant to societies, where local strength can be a decisive factor (Peacock, 2020). Multi-level governance is the distribution of political power from the centre to the sub-national levels of governments (Harmes, 2021). It engages all levels of government, including local communities, to use their diverse strength for mutual benefit. A community as a shareholder contributes and benefits from the process of localism. Localism is motivated by the decentralised developmental practice (Madanipour & Davoudi, 2015), so it is a bottom-up approach to development.

The Idea of localism coincides with power devolution from the core to the peripheries. Foucault (1995) stressed that “power is exercised rather than possessed” (p. 26). So localism is a reaction to the “political centralisation or to the impact on local communities of economic and political globalisation” (Harmes, 2021, p. 12). These interpretations of localism show that it is an essential element of people’s lives because it involves the politics of power and development. Localism places the locals at the centre of every decision-making and benefit-sharing process. It is related to self-governance, in which there is less political interference from the central bureaucracy and political system (Chaudhary, 2019). Localism is “an umbrella term

which refers to the devolution of power and/or functions and/or resources away from central control and towards front-line managers, local democratic structures, local institutions, and local communities, within an agreed framework of minimum standards” (Evans et al., 2013, p. 404). It builds system-up self-governance. Thus, localism is a political theory that advocates for dominant roles of the locals through self-governance.

Localism acknowledges people as shareholders in the community development process. It advocates for a collaborative approach to development and includes local, non-government, and government agencies to ensure representation and leadership of people as their right. It cannot operate in isolation but must be part of the overall social, political and economic agenda of a county. So, localism is centred on local strength to implement plans and policies and to make positive changes in peoples’ lives. Localism is an essential theoretical domain in the conception of this thesis in exploring school governance as Nepali schools are managed by locals who are influenced by cultural values such as collectivism and belongingness.

3.4.1 Localism and Nepali Education

The Nepali school governance model follows a localism approach to include locals in the decision-making process. The cultural value system of locals, such as collectivism, religious faith, and localism, has contributed to school development activities. Schools have different formal and informal forums, such as SMCs, PTA, Alumni, and Advisor Committees to administer its governance. These structures, which are legitimised through various educational policy provisions, allow and encourage local participation in school governance (see Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b, 2020). Thus, school governance in Nepal adopts localism as its main guiding principle.

In Nepali schools, Hinduism is a dominating cultural element. Most school leaders such as locally elected representatives, PTA and SMC members, Head Teachers, and teachers will follow this religion; the census report shows that more than 80% of Nepali people are Hindus (Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). In my experience, most public schools are named after Hindu Gods and Goddesses. Every school has a temple of the Hindu Goddess Saraswati, and these schools annually organise the puja festival of the Goddess. Children practice Hindu

Sanskrit mantras during morning assemblies. Thus, Hinduism is inseparable from school activities, and it significantly impacts the school's governance. Undoubtedly, Hinduism contributes to the flourishing of localism in Nepali school governance.

Localism has been embedded in school governance in Nepal through policies. The decentralisation of school governance to communities through SMCs was initiated in 2003, with the amendment to the 1971 Education Act in 2001 (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b). Community-managed school governance was introduced because of the failure of central governments to effectively manage the schools (Nepal National Education Commission, 1992). Through the 2015 Constitution, Nepal was politically transformed into a federal system with seven provincial, and 753 local governments (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2020b). The 2019 Nepal National Curriculum Framework mentioned preparing and implementing local curriculums in schools (Nepal Curriculum Development Center, 2019), and these policy interventions empowered locally elected bodies to govern school education. This means that educational policies in Nepal have localism at their core.

Nepali school governance considers localism to be a vital component. Furthermore, Hindu values of locals have bound school stakeholders in a thread of culture and spirituality, and these values always encourage stakeholders to work together ethically, morally, and collectively for a school's development. In my research, localism theory explains social and cultural values of Nepali people who contribute to the governance of public schools. Next is a review of, first, Eastern Philosophy then Nepali education.

3.4.2 Eastern Philosophy: Hinduism and Karma

Philosophy, which in general means 'love of wisdom', shapes human life and nourishes thoughts. The teachings of Eastern philosophy are focused on discovering the self and the spiritual transcendence of an individual (Harrison, 2019; Johnstone et al., 2016). Eastern philosophy carries the ancient knowledge of Eastern world countries such as Nepal, India, and Sri Lanka in the Indian Subcontinent that follow Hinduism and Buddhism as their religious practices (Leaman, 1999; Martins, 2018). The cultural values of Hinduism, which include togetherness, cooperation, support, and belief in Karma, are part of everyday life in these

countries (Chakraborty, 2014; Shrestha & Gupta, 2019). I have experienced these community values reflected in school governance in Nepal.

Eastern philosophy is essential to human lives. Practitioners of this philosophy adopt yogic and meditative lifestyles and belief in the law of Karma and focus on selfless devotion to work for humanity and human growth (Bapodara, 2019; Raina & Singh, 2018). The spiritual rituals in life through yoga, prayer, and meditation make an individual pleasant and blissful (Sadhguru, 2016b), which contributes to happy societies and morally integrated institutions. The 2020 World Happiness Report acknowledged the role social environment, to create mutual belongingness and social institutions, as a key to human happiness (Helliwell et al., 2020). In Hinduism, the holy Sanskrit chanting, '*Sarve bhavantu sukhina*'- means 'may all be happy', and '*Vasubaidha kutumbakam*'- means 'whole cosmos is a family' (Dhal & Roy, 2021; Rautaray et al., 2022). These teachings of gratitude and belonging are concerned with the inner wellbeing of humans and have been highly acknowledged by the World Health Organisation after the 2019 COVID-pandemic (World Health Organisation, 2022, July 26). Thus, Eastern philosophy is all about human inner wellness, social bonding, and acknowledging the presence of other humans and creatures in this world.

Eastern philosophy centralises human moral values at the core. The law of Karma envisions a utopian society where everyone loves and takes care of other beings on this earth. Bapodara (2019) highlighted the essence of the law of Karma as "actions are followed by their results", (p. 16). If we develop good moral values and invest our lives in humanity, we will always get a blessed and blissful life. The law of Karma encourages humans to follow the path of morals and ethics (Atkinson, 2010). Bhagwat Geeta, one of the ancient Hindu epics, defines Karma as doing action for others but without expecting benefit in return (Gogoi, 2014). Chakraborty (2014) elaborated, "Karma is one of the important spiritual laws that govern our life experiences through the principle of cause and effect, action and reaction, total cosmic justice, and personal responsibility. Karma is not fate" (p. 193). Karma is an important dimension in Eastern philosophy that motivates people to do good for others.

Given these points, Eastern philosophy is a thinking and practice that shape people living in Nepali society. This philosophy aims to create morally integrated social institutions and a knowledge-led society to a build prosperous country.

3.4.3 Eastern Philosophical Values in Nepali Education

Nepali people adopt Hinduism (81.3%) and Buddhism (9%) as their religions (Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Nepal has a rich educational development foundation through communities such as Ashrams, Gumba, and Madrasas as a part of religious and cultural values (Gautam & Shyangtan, 2020a). Gautam and Shyangtan elaborated that Nepali cultural and religious legacies have always stressed the association between education, sustainable development, and learning. Eastern philosophical notions have encouraged communities to promote the education system for their better living.

Schools are greatly valued in Nepali society. People have been generously working to provide resources, donate land, and work as free labourers for schools for many generations (Pradhan et al., 2019). Parents and their communities voluntarily unite as PTAs and SMCs to oversee school governance. The SMC model is the representation of locals and parents in schools and is founded on the value of togetherness and trust. This working together approach in the SMCs is compatible with the claim of Rajesh (2016), who stated that Hinduism believes the whole cosmos is a family. The work of these local stakeholders supports the four pillars of education, "learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live" (Delor, 1996, as cited in Gautam & Shyangtan, 2020b, p. 5). Further, the 2019 School Education Curriculum Framework in Nepal highlighted that curriculum is based on Nepali norms, values, and the Eastern knowledge systems (Nepal Curriculum Development Center, 2019). The Constitution of Nepal also states that children can study in schools in their mother tongue which could help to preserve the cultural, religious, and linguistic legacies of native communities (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2015). These examples show how education is prioritised in Nepali society and how Eastern philosophy is well situated in the Nepali education system.

My study on local values in school governance is closely linked to Eastern philosophy. This philosophy provides a cultural framework for understanding school governance in relation to people's values. It explains how Nepali society is structured and how communities work

collectively for the common good, including school management. Eastern philosophy also serves as a theoretical lens to explore the spiritual significance of Hindu goddess idols in schools. Furthermore, Nepal's education policies, including acts, curricula, and the constitution, recognize Eastern philosophy as the foundation of educational development. In summary, traditional socio-cultural practices remain prevalent in Nepali society, with Eastern philosophy serving as their foundation.

My study on exploring local values on school governance is closely linked to Eastern philosophy. This philosophy provides a cultural framework for understanding school governance in relation to the values of those who follow Hinduism. It explains how Nepali society is structured and how people function collectively for common welfares such as school management. Eastern philosophy serves as a theoretical lens to elaborate spiritual values of having idols of Hindu goddess in schools. Furthermore, Nepal Government's policy provisioning, such as education acts, curriculum, and constitution of the country, also considers Eastern Philosophy as the foundation of educational growth. In summary, the traditional socio-cultural practices remain prevalent in Nepali society, and Eastern philosophy acts as their foundation. The next section considers the theory of New Public Management (NPM) and global governance to explain the political influences on school education. In my research, NPM is a dominant theory and global governance is its subordinate theory when interpreting reforms in school governance due to the role of power and status of school stakeholders.

3.5 New Public Management Reforms

New Public Management (NPM) theory emerged in capitalistic nations that adopted neoliberal reforms during the late 1970s. Neoliberalism is a philosophy which explains how societies that adopt capitalism are managed by strengthening the role of the private sector and weakening the influence of government (Bresser-Pereira, 2009). NPM theory is oriented away from welfare-oriented bureaucracy towards market-friendly, competitive, and outcomes-based reforms. Traditional bureaucracy lacked managerial efficiency, and people did not have easy access to it, which gave rise to the NPM (Haque, 2004). NPM is also termed as reinventing the government (Kearney & Hays, 1998) and includes making public service delivery efficient. It also stresses decentralising the decision-making authorities (Kearney & Hays, 1998) and is based on

reforming public administration through economic and managerial lenses. These reforms are expected to make public administration output-oriented and competitive, and sub-national governments have autonomy from central governments when performing their tasks (Gautam, 2008, September 18). Hood (1991) proposed seven doctrines in NPM. These include:

- Hands-on professional management in the public sector
- Explicit standards and measures of performance
- Greater emphasis on output control
- Shifts to disaggregation of units in the public sector
- Shifts to greater competition in the public sector
- Stress on private sector style management practice
- Stress on greater discipline and parsimony in resource use

These NPM principles outlined by Hood mean that public sectors will produce high outcome-based performance if their management team is professional and efficient. NPM is a shift from public administration to public management, which is also helpful in reforming school education by encompassing the public's strengths. School systems can be better managed through the devolution of managerial authorities to local level implementing bodies. Local stakeholders can explore additional school support through their networks and influences, which higher governments cannot afford (World Bank, 1988, as cited in Weiler, 1990). Larbi (1999) discussed that decentralising public school management for better outcomes is aligned with NPM. Based on the literature review (Gautam, 2008; Haque, 2004; Hood, 1991; Kearney & Hays, 1998; Weiler, 1990), I focus the discussion on NPM reforms in Nepali education in aspects such as an efficient school management team and education-related power devolution from central to local governments.

3.5.1 NPM in Nepali Education

NPM reforms in school education started with the intervention of School Management Committees from 2003 (Rajbhandari, 2016). In 1951-1970, communities always had a core role in school governance; however, the nationalisation of education during the Panchayat rule in 1971 limited their role (Pradhan et al., 2019). The SMC model began with the support of the World Bank to improve the quality and access to primary education (Sharma, 2008). The World Bank launched the Community Schools Support Project (CSSP) to form SMCs in public schools

across the country (The World Bank, 2010b). This model again brought back the communities for effective school management (Dhungel et al., 2013). “State from manager to facilitator of schooling” was the core mantra of decentralising school management to the SMCs (Carney et al., 2007, p. 611). The SMC model is the implementation of NPM in order to mobilise the potential of local stakeholders in education development.

It has been nearly two decades since the implementation of SMCs and there have been observable reforms in school governance and management. In Nepal, there was a leadership vacuum at local level from 2002- 2016 due to there being no local elections (Chetri, 2017). Despite this, SMCs continued to work at the forefront of developing their schools, and their roles were legitimised with the seventh amendment of the 1971 Education Act in 2001 (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b). With the formation of SMCs, there are examples of good governance practices in schools. Parents and communities gathered local funds for school infrastructure development, and teachers were punctual during school hours and accountable in their duties due to increased mobilisation of parents and communities into schools (The World Bank, 2010b). Likewise, the increase in enrolment rates, the provision the lifelong teaching, and the reduction of gender disparities at schools were made possible through decentralised governance of school education (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2016). Due to the high engagement of communities in school management, the networking of schools increased which supported local funding. Hard-to-reach populations started to send their children to schools, and there has been an increase in enrolment rates (Shah, 2016). Shah added that the active roles of parents and communities in schools improved the quality of instruction as textbooks were distributed in time, classes were made child friendly, and teachers were sent for training. These examples show that managerial reforms in school education through the NPM model resulted in better education outputs.

Since 2015, there has been a new political system in Nepal whereby school education is the responsibility of local governments. The 2016 School Sector Development Plan and the 2019 National Education Policy included leading roles for local governments in school management and outlined the SMCs as supportive organisations of the these governments in managing school education (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016b, 2019). With respect to the

local education acts of the two local governments where I undertook this study, it was mentioned that elected Ward representatives now lead the SMCs (not cited due to anonymity). It seems like school management responsibilities have been recentralised to governments in Nepal. However, it is not easy for local governments to deny local community involvement in the school development process because public schools lack sufficient financial resources and they need high budgetary support to transform plans and policies into activities (A. R. Bhattarai, 2022; Dhungana et al., 2021). There is a vertical power relationship between the central and local governments, and the centre is reluctant to decentralise school related power to local levels (Hamal, 2020). In this context, locals can provide moral, physical, and financial backstopping to schools. So, local governments can consider communities as an important stakeholder in reforming public education.

Overall, Nepal adapted the NPM model in reforming public education through the SMCs. The SMCs focus on efficient school management and local governance of public education. In my research, NPM theory explains school governance through managerial reforms of schools, where locals and parents participate in SMCs (see Hood, 1991). It also examines the consequences of education decentralisation processes in Lalitpur, Nepal (see Larbi, 1999). The following section presents a review related to the support of global communities in educational development in Nepal.

3.5.2 Global Governance Theory

In the twentieth century, globalisation was prominent in disseminating the values of capitalist economic systems worldwide (Shahzad, 2006). Capitalism is an economic practice which lobbies the power influences of ruling classes, free market competition, economic growth, and value for money (Miller, 2022; Reuss, 2020). This dissemination also favoured the transmission of western values and cultures worldwide (Irani & Noruzi, 2011). Globalisation also established a notion that all the countries in the world can be connected with common values through regional and global interactions (Faulconbridge & Beaverstock, 2009). Debates on global governance emerged as a new human development discourse during the late twentieth century (Halliday, 2000). Halliday elaborated that nations globally realised the necessity to build relations among the states, to work together on humanity's problems, and to

help the underdeveloped. Debates surged because humanity faced multiple problems, such as war, poverty, climate change, and economic crises, and no single state had an efficient system to deal with these (Jang et al., 2016). These issues needed a "variety of actors and expertise necessary to frame threats properly, devise pertinent policy, implement effectively and evaluate results accurately" (Jang et al., 2016, p. 2). These global situations gave rise to the idea of global governance to establish connections among nations and to help each other.

Global governance can be viewed from two perspectives: political and developmental. Regarding the political dimension, global governance is blamed for carrying the western worldview, such as taking the lead on global political discourse, expanding markets, and technology transfer, to ultimately manage the globalisation process (Benedict, 2015). Benedict added that this impact of global governance is widening the economic gap between rich and developing nations, is causing rapid environmental degradation, and is intolerant to the diverse cultural values of recipient countries. Zürn (2013) mentioned that global governance is a political tool of developed nations to rule developing nations through international policies, funding, and legislation that seem to benefit all. On the other hand, the development perspective of global governance helps to coordinate nations to achieve development goals. The Goal 17 of the SDG by the United Nations mentioned: "strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development" (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2015b, p. 26). Thus, global governance has serious implications for developing countries when they receive foreign support and collaboration for development, such as in education.

3.5.3 Global Governance in Education

The globalisation of education started after the 1980s. Developing countries began to depend on developed nations for innovative solutions to reforming their education systems (Mundy et al., 2016). Carney and Klerides (2020) highlighted that three forces influence global education. First is the private sector, which is invested in profit maximisation. Second are the developed nations who help third-world countries that are lagging being in education. This support is made through several organisations such as the World Bank, Arab league, African union, European union, and so on. Third are philanthropic organisations, such as the Bill and

Melinda Gates Foundation, driven by business, social, or political elites. These three forces dominate intervention and seek a share in improving the global education system, which brings the situation to the "end of the state" (Carney & Klerides, 2020, p. 81). The weak nations borrow the ideas on and funding for education development from the developed world, and so these developing nations contribute in the global march of education reform (Carney & Klerides, 2020). In this regard, global governance contributes to both positive and negative roles in the educational development of a nation.

On the positive side, global governance provides global space for internationalising educational problems and seeks solutions collaboratively (Solesin, 2020). Solesin believed that this governance would help set a quality standard for education and support developing countries in achieving their targets. The influential countries or organisations prescribe educational policies and approaches to homogenise education in a standard frame (Sellar & Lingard, 2013, p. 723). The influence of global governance in education is almost inevitable, and a state can benefit from global governance if its local democratic institutions take the lead in the development process, including education reform (Joo & Halx, 2022). Similarly, the efforts of international organisations, such as the World Bank, help to advocate for and work on quality education across the globe. They have created a platform for policy discourse as "global policy speak" (Novoa, 2002, as cited in Mundy et al., 2016, p. 6). So, global governance is an essential development discourse to promote education in poor nations by the efforts of developed nations.

Apart from these benefits, global governance poses many risks to educational development. Global educational policies which arise in a different political context are difficult to harmonise and contextualise in a developing country (Solesin, 2020). Poorly developed countries have less influence—and do not contribute to making these global policies—to shape their lives for the better (United Nations, 2014). Global governance threatens a state's sovereignty to decide their philosophy of education, as this governance impedes the values of education privatisation through neoliberal approaches (Joo & Halx, 2022; Mundy, 2007). It is also claimed that international organisations are rubber stamps of western hegemony that ultimately create wider social inequalities in developing nations (Zürn, 2013). These

international organisations such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Union, and United Nations are the largest development partners attempting to enhance Nepali education (see Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016b, 2021; Regmi, 2017).

In addition, the norms and principles of global governance are guided by the western and industrialised mindset (Hurrell, 2007, as cited in Benedict, 2015). This governance is influenced by the power politics of key nation-states that are influential in global politics. Global governance serves the political interests of powerful nations through “struggles over wealth, power, and knowledge” (Murphy, 2000, p. 798, as cited in Karns & Mingst, 2010). A state principally constitutes three things: sovereign decision-making authority, political legitimacy of self-governance, and equitable development of its citizen. Global governance is a challenge to all these foundation of a state (Komesar et al., 2014). Developed countries invariably put pressure on developing countries to agree to the former’s agendas when giving aid support (Salami, 2020); thus, global governance is creating power dominance worldwide in the name of aid support to poor countries.

Overall, there is no doubt that twenty-first century development needs global coordination and support. The developed countries are obliged to support the least developed countries to prevent humanitarian crises in developing nations over such things as food, health, and education. There are academic debates that global governance is inclined toward more political interests and imposes unnecessary policy prescriptions for developing nations (Joo & Halx, 2022; Mundy, 2007; Salami, 2020; Zürn, 2013). Despite the vested interests of powerful nations when serving the poor, global governance is very important to improving the living standards of impoverished people.

3.5.4 Nepali Education and the Global Governance

Nepal is one of the least developed countries in the world and is in the process of upgrading to a developing nation by 2026 (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2020c; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2019). The country’s Multidimensional Poverty Index is 17.6% (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2021). At least one-fourth of the annual budget of the country comes from international aid (Nepal Ministry of Finance, 2017). The 2020 Fifteenth Plan of the country considers foreign aid as an essential assistance to the country's

development (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2020a). Thus, global aid is taken for granted in Nepal's development, including in education, with both positive and negative impacts. Additionally, Nepal is a member of the United Nations and must achieve the SDGs by 2030, and this achievement is only possible through its global cooperation. The Goal 17 of the SDG has included “strengthening the means of implantation and revitalising the global partnership for sustainable development”(United Nations, 2021, p. 60). Global cooperation is only the way for Nepal to achieve the SDGs for the growth and wellbeing of its citizens.

Nepal depends on international communities for funding to develop the country's education system, and international funding agencies such as the World Bank are influential in reforming educational policies in the country (Regmi, 2015, 2021a). There are popular terminologies, namely “basket fund” (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 61) and “joint financing partners” (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016b, p. 87), employed to bring in financial resources from donor countries for educational development programs. After the 1990s democratic movement in the country, donors heavily supported different educational development plans and projects; these included the 1991-2001 Master Plan for Basic and Primary Education (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004; Nepal Ministry of Education, 1997); the 2001-2015 Education for All Plan (Nepal Ministry of Education and Sports, 2003); the 2003-2008 Community Schools Support Project (The World Bank, 2010a); the 2009-2016 School Sector Reform Plan (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2009); and the 2016-2023 School Sector Development Plan (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016b; United Nations Children's Fund, 2017). It is also accepted that global influence is one of the causes of decentralisation in Nepal's education governance (Khanal, 2013a). Thus, Nepal's educational development prioritises global support as a critical component (Dangal, 2013), in which global governance is taken for granted.

Educational development effort in Nepal is more than just localised. The support of the international communities has roles in reforming school governance through funding and policies development. Global governance is essential to strengthening the local effort of school education growth in the country. In my research, global governance helps me to understand

the aid flow mechanism from donors to schools along with the power exercises of school stakeholders.

3.6 Chapter Summary

In the conceptual framework I have described, I have visualised my research journey by situating it within a social constructionist world view and narratively theorising school governance research in the context of local values and political influences. I have signalled a narrative inquiry methodology as the research plan with the use of interviews and observations as methods to conduct my research. These methods derive narrative findings from the field, and the theoretical explanations on these narrative findings answer the research questions of the study. I have detailed Localism-Eastern philosophy theories to interpret the narrative findings on people's local values, and I use New Public Management- Global governance theories to explain how political influences shape the group's and communities' involvement in school governance. Chapter Four presents my research methodology of narrative inquiry that explains the research methods I used to collect stories as texts from my participants, and my approach to interpreting meaning from this rich evidence.

Chapter Four

Research Methodology: Design and Activation

In this chapter, I present my research methodology where I discuss narrative inquiry, my research context and participants, and the methods of data collection. The literature review and conceptual framework [refer to Chapters Two and Three] inform the reader that narrative inquiry methodology is a research approach to collect lived experiences of school stakeholders who are engaged in school governance. For my research, I found stories to be the best way to collect people's life events and to understand their meanings in broader social perspectives (McAlpine, 2016).

As a returnee Nepali researcher from a New Zealand university, I situated this research within three public schools in Lalitpur, Nepal. I give an overview of narrative inquiry and detail why this approach was chosen to reveal my participants' experiences. I then discuss how narrative inquiry relates to the methodological section of the conceptual framework [refer to Figure 5, p. 40]. In order to collect my participants' views and experiences, I used interviews and observations as methods of data collection. My research settings such as place, social and geographical context, schools, and participants, are discussed next. In research activation, I detail how I approached the field, how the field work was conducted, and how I interpreted the participants' narratives. Finally, I discuss how researcher's ethics and the research's quality standards were upheld throughout the research journey. This methodology chapter presents my research plan for conducting this research on school governance.

4.1 Context

My research purpose was to explore school governance in the context of locals' value systems and political influences in Lalitpur, Nepal. I began my PhD research in the University of Waikato in New Zealand in February 2020, a month before the COVID-pandemic spread worldwide.

When planning the field visit of this research in Nepal, I determined I could conduct interviews either virtually or physically. After the Covid-19 pandemic affected the world in 2019, there were academic recommendations that field movements had to be reduced and interviews should be done through virtual means (Archibald et al., 2019; Cowie & Khalil, 2020;

Jones & Abdelfattah, 2020; Roberts et al., 2021). However, I view that online data collection would miss research processes that a researcher could experience while being physically at research sites. These research processes include building closeness and trust with participants, making observations, taking account of subjective feelings, and sustaining deep engagements between the researcher and the researched; all of these are the essential components of inductive research to enrich a research writing (Barrett & Twycross, 2018; Bearman, 2019). Furthermore, learning is said to be earned from a research journey or a process that we adopt during the research (Harris & Walling, 2017). Additionally, many people in Nepal lack suitable mobile technologies, internet facilities, and smartphones (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2020c); thus the absence of digital technology would hinder online data collection from a distance. Thus, I found in-person interactions with participants to be the best option for academic qualitative research, especially in the least developed countries, such as Nepal. So, amid the health pandemic, I travelled back to Nepal to conduct the field visit of my PhD research in January 2021. My decision to return home for data was fruitful. I interacted with 51 participants and interviewed 43 of them physically in three different public schools in Lalitpur. I visited schools and local communities, talked to people, and observed their socio-cultural settings as a part of my research process. I collected exciting stories from my participants that showed their roles and contribution in school governance. As follows, I provide a discussion based on narrative inquiry methodology.

4.2 Narrative Inquiry

Narratives are the stories told to share people's lived experiences. Stories are valuable for understanding individual sociocultural experiences in a context, and storytelling is an easy way to share these with others (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Pavlenko, 2002, as cited in Berry, 2015). A narrator retells these stories by embedding self-reflections and personal inputs (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). Wang and Geale (2015) suggest that narrative research interprets the physical world through participants' life stories, and Bleakley (2005) states, "Narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research that takes the story as either its raw data or its product" (p. 534). The stories contain the emotions of the participants and the settings of the inquiry contexts, which help to provide thick descriptions during the meaning-making of the research

(Butina, 2015; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010). Narrative embodies information from participants; however, the narrative is more than the data—narrative is also a form of inquiry or research in which stories have the critical roles of meaning-making.

Generally, inquiry means getting information from people by questioning. Narrative inquiry is more concerned with listening to human stories and understanding these in a meaningful way to unpack social meanings. Authors have provided different definitions about narrative inquiry. McAlpine (2016) revealed that a story of an individual could be interpreted in a broader sense with societal implications. Barkhuizen (2018) claimed that stories are the central concern of narrative research, where the researcher collects stories, makes out the meanings, and retells those. Fina (2015) understood narrative inquiry in two dimensions: storytelling by a participant, and stories retold by a narrator. Caine et al. (2018) pointed out that narrative inquiry could be a method to gather the experiences of humans and a methodology to craft the meaning of human issues in social research. Smith (2013) mentioned that “stories are ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture so that the new generations will treasure them and pass the story down further” (p. 146). In this perspective, narrative researchers need a deep immersion in the participants' stories (Caine et al., 2018). These scholarly discussions make it evident that narrative inquiry is a research methodology in itself.

Information from my participants comes in a number of different forms through interviews and a range of other methods. The storied experiences of humans can be captured within a continuum of time, spatial dimensions that allow the stories to germinate and blossom, and human interactions that build the stories. There is a dominant trend of framing narrative stories in the thread of sociality, temporality, and place (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). A narrative researcher crafts these scattered stories into a ‘resonant thread’ (Huber et al., 2018). The thread gives sensible meanings from the diverse range of lived experiences of participants, which is presented as story-retelling by the narrative researcher. Thus, narrative inquiry is an appropriate methodology in qualitative research to get meanings from socially constructed realities in the lives of participants.

It is also essential that a narrative researcher cannot be absent during the story-retelling process and has to situate themselves in the stories. Clandinin and Caine (2012) expressed that narrative inquiry is "an ongoing reflexive and reflective methodology" as it is inseparable from the researcher's thinking (p. 3). They further suggested that a narrator gets immersed in the participants' stories and starts to live along with these stories. This musing between the researcher and participants establishes that "both participant and researcher are in the process of becoming" in narrative inquiry methodology (Caine et al., 2018, p. 141). A storyteller (participant) and a story-re-teller (researcher) are both critical dimensions of narrative research (Barkhuizen, 2019).

I reflect on several understandings of the narrative inquiry methodology. Stories are rich texts that contain human experiences, and narrative inquiry is collecting and retelling these stories to develop a meaning that has broader implications. Here a narrator co-constructs the stories of participants. The stories can stand within the continuum of sociality, temporality and place in which participants live. Narrative inquiry better captures human sentiments through sociocultural perspectives, and these perspectives embed human values that have been transferred to the succeeding generations through stories. This inquiry can be used as a methodological guide that unveils humans' lived experiences to get meaning in terms of broader societal and cultural pictures. A narrative researcher cannot be apart from the stories; they should put self-reflection and reflexivity into these stories which orient the research in meeting its purpose. These insights guided me to adopt the narrative inquiry methodology in my research to explore the value systems of locals and political influences in school governance in Lalitpur, Nepal.

4.2.1 Choice on Narrative Inquiry as Methodology

The literature review of my research informs the reader that educational policy such as acts, policies, regulations, and the constitution, are dominant in defining the roles of local stakeholders in Nepali school governance [refer to Chapter Two: Literature Review]. However, the voices of parents, locals, teachers, Head Teachers, locally elected representatives, Education Officers are missing in the academic discourse to explain how local stakeholders engage in schools and how this engagement contributes to school governance. My research

was about exploring people's values and political influences in school governance through the voices of local stakeholders, and a human voice can be better understood through their stories of lived experiences (Jha, 2018).

I conducted my research in Nepal, which is dominated by Hinduism/Eastern Philosophy. The philosophy of Hinduism is rich in narrative texts (Birkenholtz, 2019; Das, 2015), most of which concern Gods and Goddess, and their association with truth, divinity, and kindness. These stories are still alive after thousands of years because of narrative shaping over time (Valdez, 2015). As a follower of Hinduism, I am influenced by stories and their meanings in terms of society, culture, and religion. In my society, the cultural influence of Hinduism prepares people to remember their past events and to share these with others in a storied way. This dimension of stories in Hinduism encouraged me to apply narrative inquiry to explore the life experiences of my participants, who predominantly follow Hinduism.

4.2.2 Methods

I chose interviews and observation methods to collect narrative findings from my participants. In the following section I discuss these methods.

Interviews with my Participants

Interviews are helpful for a researcher to collect human experiences through their life stories (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2015). I conducted semi-structured interviews with 43 research participants. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. I sought consent for recording and taking notes-of the interviews. I had a list of provisional questions to begin the interaction with the participants, but these questions did not limit the interview process (Cristancho et al., 2018). I probed the lived experiences of my participants concerning their understanding and engagement in school governance. All the interviews were in-depth, which supported my research as constructing narrative meanings requires considerable time and engagement with participants (Deterding & Waters, 2018; Owino & Weber, 2020). The interviews helped me to achieve "thick descriptions of real-life settings and understandings of participants' worldviews" (Ospina et al., 2018, p. 593). Interviews assisted me in gathering the narratives of participants in the social and cultural context of where they lived. I remained

open-minded in getting diverse responses from my participants, which was essential for my narrative writing (Chughtai & Myers, 2017).

Before conducting interviews, I prepared some initial questions, which are fundamental to beginning a research study and expanding the inquiry through dialogues with participants (Agee, 2009). I developed the initial questions by expanding the key terminologies from my research questions which included people's local values, and political influences in Nepali school governance. These questions helped me to start the conversations, but I gradually developed new questions by applying the probing technique. Probing is asking follow-up questions based on participant responses, which helps to gather rich information during research (Weller et al., 2018). I used starters in these initial questions to prolong the conversation, such as: can you please share, what do you think, in your view, tell me some details, and describe (Banerjee & Dixit, 2021). The initial interview questions that were developed are listed in Appendix One [refer to p. 255]. The questions in the Appendix One were asked with the participants according to their roles in school governance.

Observation of Human and Physical Landscape on Each Research Site

While going to interviews, the observation method supported field information which strengthened my narrative writing. Observation is a research method in which we purposefully watch events in relation to the lives of our participants and draw conclusions (Ciesielska et al., 2018). In my study, the Hindu cues in every researched school, such as temples and religious celebrations, enabled me to intensify the narrative findings concerning the local cultural values. The Goddess Saraswati's temples signalled the Hindu religion's position and influence in schools. I found that naming the *Sahar ko school* and the *Gaau ko school* was done after the two Hindu Gods. In the *Sahar ko school*, I attended the Saraswati puja⁶ which was organised by teachers and students. Locals also attended the puja, which helped me to understand the religious bonding between the school and communities. Similarly, I observed a volleyball match organised by local youths at the *Gaau ko school* premise. These events helped me to become familiar with many participants and observe their dedication to school activities. During the visit

⁶ A Hindu tradition to worship goddess Saraswati, which is an annual festival in Nepal

to each school, I inspected their walls, paintings, and stone plaques⁷. Those artefacts gave me background information to discuss with my participants and to show them that I was a part of their lives. In all schools, I could see the name lists of SMC and PTA members displayed publicly on walls. I noted them and established contact with some of them personally. In the rural school, a photo of a land donor to the school was kept at the Head Teacher's office, which gave me insights into how locals helped to establish the school and how the school acknowledges the benevolence of the locals. I travelled by public buses as this was the most convenient way of travelling to different regions in Lalitpur, and I could scan the local geography and interact with people.

4.3 Research's Setting

Here I detail my research's physical and social settings, time and political situation, the participants' and schools.

4.3.1 Study Area: Physical and Social Settings

The 2015 Constitution politically restructured Nepal into one central, seven provincial, and 753 local governments. In order to undertake this research, I chose three public schools in three local governments in Lalitpur district, Bagmati province, Nepal. The *Sahar ko school* is situated in an urban settlement in the Patan Metropolitan City, the *Semi- Sahar ko school* is a semi-urban school in the Setidevi Municipality, and the *Gaaun ko school* is a rural school in the Kalidevi Rural Municipality. I use pseudonyms for these schools and local governments.

I chose these schools because I am a local of Lalitpur, and these schools were close to my house. Being a former public-school teacher, I had familiar relationships with some teachers working in these schools. I received quick verbal consent from these schools before my field deployment to conduct this research. The choices of schools and participants was based on my judgment as a qualitative researcher. In qualitative research, a researcher can use a judgemental method to choose the participants by identifying organisations who can give the best answers to the research problem (Rahi, 2017; Sharma, 2017).

⁷ Names of donors are carved in stone plaques and kept on the school premise

My research location, Lalitpur, is known for its traditional arts and crafts, being the home of living Goddess Kumari, and its ancient temples (Ghimire, 2018). My family migrated to Lalitpur city from the western hills of Nepal long ago. As a local, I know that people prefer to reside here because of opportunities such as employment, education, health services, international airport, transport connectivity to different parts of the country, and easy contact with central bureaucracy and politicians. Migrants who come from impoverished backgrounds send their children to public schools because of the free education supported by the government. Local residents tend to send their children to private schools which are said to provide quality education. In my settlement in urban Lalitpur, there are at least ten private schools and only two public schools.

Two local governments of my research, Patan Metropolitan City and Setidevi municipality, lie close to the capital city, Kathmandu. These local governments are inhabited by local residents such as the Newari people as well as migrants from different districts. The case of Kalidevi Rural Municipality is different. It is located in a rural region with less physical development like good roads, hospitals, and universities. The majority of the people are local who depend on agriculture, are hardworking, and are united to make their place better. I have been to this rural municipality several times, including to collect data from my Masters degree in 2010. This was during my professional career to monitor skills' development programs in 2013, and to visit temples in 2015. Kalidevi rural municipality is noted for famous Hindu and Buddhist pilgrims in Lalitpur. There are 28 schools in this rural municipality, only one of which is private. In these three local governments, Hinduism and Buddhism are dominant and people celebrate festivals as a part of their cultural activities.

4.3.2 Time and Political Situation

I started my field work in February 2021 in Lalitpur, Nepal. The first wave of the COVID-pandemic affected the country from March to September 2020, and schools were physically shut after the pandemic began. In November 2020, the Central Government issued the COVID-Related School Opening Guideline which allowed the schools to reopen with permission from their respective local governments (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2020a). Schools were gradually opened from January 2021. Due to the fear of the pandemic, I initially

found many people in Lalitpur were uncomfortable talking with strangers and participating in research interviews. The aftershocks of the first Covid wave were still being felt in society and schools; however, these started to function as usual. Nepali people had already started to live with the pandemic because of their resilience (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2020c; Posch et al., 2019). They have a hospitable culture that welcomes guests (Badal, 2019), and never say 'no' to the kind requests of strangers. This general hospitality facilitated my conduct of the narrative research with my participants. In addition, my identity as a local in Lalitpur, former public school teacher, and a research student at Kathmandu University helped me to gain easy approval from schools to conduct interviews. I adopted all health safety measures, such as maintaining social distancing while taking interviews, wearing a face mask, and regular hand washing to keep myself and my participants safe from viral infection. The COVID-pandemic was one of the subjective events in Nepali society, and this situation complimented the broader narratives in my research.

January and February are usually the coldest months in Kathmandu, and schools have a winter vacation for at least a month. At Lalitpur, the temperature falls very low, even to minus degrees during the winter season. The sun becomes visible only at noon and it's hard to see mountains and hills. However, 2021 was exceptional. In 2020, schools were closed for ten months until January of the next year due to the COVID-pandemic and had only recently reopened. Schools did not give the winter vacation to students so as to cover the courses, this meant I usually met participants at their residences after gaining their consent.

I noted that my research was affected by the political situation in Nepal. During my field visit period in February 2021, there were political issues at the central government level. Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli dissolved the parliament on December 20, 2020 and announced fresh elections. This was a political decision by the elected government; however, on February 22, the Supreme Court reinstated the parliament, deciding that the move of the Prime Minister was unconstitutional (Sharma, 2021, February 23). The scene was a cold war between the executive and judiciary organs of the government in Nepal, which was a rare happening. This political unrest in Nepal in the first quarter of 2021 heated grassroots politics in Lalitpur society. I could see agitation, rallies, and demonstrations by political parties daily while I was on the way to my

research sites, where I found participants such as school teachers and locals busily discussing politics at tea shops. This political situation helped me to initiate discussion with my participants. I became interested to explore how local school stakeholders included political interests in their personal and social lives.

4.3.3 Participants

Out of my potential research participants, I interviewed forty-three respondents who met the eligibility criteria for my interviews. The criteria included their experiences and involvement in school management activities, their willingness to participate, and their availability at my interview times. In a qualitative research, the number of participants is chosen for interviews to meet the requirement of the study (Mocănașu, 2020). In every school, the number of male participants was high because it is a reality that most of the vocal members in school governance structures are males (Dhakai, 2021; Sijapati, 2019). However, I did try to incorporate a significant number of females in the research wherever I could. Table 1 in Chapter 5 [refer to p. 79] lists the participants and their roles in the three study schools. The participants I interviewed at the *Sahar ko school* numbered 16 including 5 women, *Semi-Sahar ko school* numbered 12 including a woman, and the *Gau ko school* numbered 15 men I have provided pseudonyms for all my participants to protect their identity.

4.4. Research Activation

How I accomplished the field work to collect narrative findings from the participants is described as follows. I discuss the research activation phase; namely, liaison persons, field activities, writing daily reflections, and post field work.

4.4.1 Support of Liaison Persons

Before my departure to the field, I gathered basic information about my study's schools, such as the details on the Head Teachers and the SMC Chairs, the study area's geographical and social settings, and each school's history. I contacted my liaison persons in all three schools. Singh and Wassenaar (2016) called these liaison persons gatekeepers because they help researchers build collaborative relationships with participants and identify appropriate persons for the research. In my research, these persons were Mr Shanti (the computer teacher) in the *Sahar ko school*, Mr Dhyan (the Head Teacher) in the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, and Mr Pandit (the

Nepali subject teacher) in the *Gaau ko school*. As a former teacher and local in Lalitpur, I have had friendly relationships with these people for a long time. They informed me about opening dates of schools which had been closed due to the COVID- pandemic, the pandemic related health safety measures in the schools, time schedules for meeting the Head Teachers, and possible research participants. Speaking with the liaison persons helped me to keep aware of the schooling cultures and climates to make plans for my visits to the school and communities.

4.4.2 Field Activities

Fieldwork is essential for interacting with participants, collecting their real-world experiences and exploring their lives and livelihoods (Adhikari, 2022). My research was situated in the three schools and their surrounding communities in Lalitpur. At each research site, my liaisons helped me introduce myself to the Head Teachers who organised initial introductions with the SMC members, parents, and community members. The Head Teachers forwarded me the names of potential research participants. I selected participants based on their engagement, knowledge about school governance, willingness to participate in my research, and their time availability for my research.

There were similar features regarding my fieldwork in the three schools. Before every interview, I briefed my research participants. After participants agreed to be interviewed, I asked them to sign participant consent forms. I wrote out the interview responses, and in some cases recorded them after gaining consent. All the participants understood and spoke the Nepali Language, which is my mother tongue. I did not need a translator or interpreter while collecting data.

I observed that building construction work was ongoing through the active engagement of local communities in all three schools. These buildings were being built with the funding of the central government or donors. I saw that students were pleased to be back in the schools after several months of school closure due to the COVID-pandemic, even though students and teachers had wear face masks to prevent spreading the virus. In the *Sahar ko school*, a separate hand washing tab and water tank had been placed. In order to reduce the crowd of students, the *Sahar ko* and *Semi- Sahar ko schools* had conducted classes in two shifts so that some

students attended in the morning and others in the afternoon. In addition to the above, I had different experiences in each of the three schools as below.

At the *Sahar ko school*, I completed my research in February 2021. I participated in the Saraswoti Puja event, a religious gathering in the school. During the puja event, I observed the roles of the Hindu religion in school activities. I studied the stone plaque kept on the school premise, which had the names of donors who had contributed to the school. In the school's backyard, I saw a water tank built by a local three decades ago. The water tank was left uncared, covered with grasses, and had broken taps. This tank helped me to understand the past local support system of communities to schools and how the school cared for the support of former generations. I completed my research at the *Semi-Sahar ko school* in March 2021. I had informal chats with a tea-shop owner close by the school. I observed the ongoing school dismantling and new construction works and interacted with school stakeholders involved in these works. At the *Gaau ko school*, I conducted my fieldwork from the fourth week of March until mid-April 2021. I observed various livelihood activities of rural people, such as organic farming, dairying, growing herbal medicines, and broom and basket making. I visited a Hindu pilgrim at the rural settlement which is a famous religious site in Lalitpur where hundreds of people make visit every year. It was renovated with the engagement of communities a couple of decades ago by raising local funds. These observational visits helped me to become submerged in my participants' social and cultural settings. I observed one volleyball tournament organised by local youths at the school's ground. The school had freely provided its ground, electricity supply, drinking water, toilets, desk, chairs, and other necessities for the event. The Deputy Chair of the Kalidevi Rural Municipality chaired the competition. I got to interact with some locals, youths, and teachers who had come to see the match. The volleyball match helped me learn how school-community relations exist in rural societies.

Adapting my Research Approach in the Field

Research design includes the choices of methodology and methods, participants, study area, fieldwork plan, maintaining a quality standard of research, approach to interpreting the findings, and ethical concerns in a research (Akhtar, 2016). Qualitative research design can be revised to adapt to learning made in the field (Ohman, 2005). Including new aspects into a

qualitative research design after field mobilisation and interaction with participants is common because this research aims to explore and address social problems by listening to voices of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In view of this accepted procedure, I revised the research design as discussed below.

Earlier I had prepared a list of provisional questions based on my experiences, supervisors' suggestions, theories, and the literature. As I began inquires with my participants about their engagements in school governance and probing their stories, I realised there were more areas to explore. Research questions can be continuously developed after conversing with study participants (Agee, 2009). This development is essential to accommodate diverse voices of participants related to the research. Accordingly, I added new questions related to the COVID-pandemic, the role of local governments in schooling education, the past support system of communities for schools, and the influence of politics in school decision-making.

Likewise, I had anticipated that my participants would be Head Teachers, SMC presidents and its members, parents, and Education Officers. After interacting with many school stakeholders in the field, I found other important stakeholders related to school governance, such as PTA Chair and its members, Alumni members, and Elected Ward Representatives. I completed interviews and informal talks with some local participants and students who provided me with diverse narrative texts on school governance.

Similarly, I had envisaged that I would undertake interviews at neutral venues, such as school meeting halls or appropriate meeting rooms, to which unauthorised persons would not have access. I had planned these venues so that participants could present their views openly despite their power and positionalities (Elwood & Martin, 2000). However, I could not conduct most of the interviews in the school venues due to the impact of COVID. Some of my participants thought we should avoid school gatherings for everyone's safety. Many participants invited me to their houses for the interviews. I got verbal consent to go to their homes and written consent for their interviews.

Due to the havoc caused by COVID, I applied social distancing with my participants while taking their interviews. I wore a facemask and used hand sanitisers whilst conducting interviews. As a part of Nepali culture, I did Namaskar to greet them instead of handshaking.

One of my participants became infected by the COVID virus after I planned to interview her. I telephoned her, wished her good health, and postponed the interview for the time being. After her recovery, I obtained her consent and interviewed her.

Previously, I had chosen the two schools from urban and semi-urban settings for my research. As I interacted with the participants in these schools, their narratives of lived experiences about working in school governance were similar. This was possibly due to the two settings sharing similar culture and close geography. I consulted with my research supervisors, who permitted me to add one school with a different geographical identity. I started contacting rural schools in Lalitpur and got a quick and positive response from the *Gaa ko school* at *Khaldo Bazaar* in Kalidevi Rural Municipality. I added this to my research which consequently increased the participants' numbers. Adding one more school was done to get diversity in data and to enrich my narrative findings and discussion. Covering a wide range of data in a study helps maintain data saturation in a piece of research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, as cited in Saunders et al., 2018).

4.4.3 Writing Daily Field Reflections

After I returned from the field every day, I wrote my reflections. This helped me to remember my daily activities and to keep track of the daily learning from the field. These reflections were based on participants' views and my observations in the field. These also included my approaches to building rapport and trust with my participants, their non-verbal cues during interviews, geography, and socio-cultural settings. These things were not gathered through participants' narratives but were very useful in enriching my narrative discussions. Reflections of a narrator are important when crafting narrative writings (Dhungel, 2022; Moen, 2006). Researcher's views come along with presenting the narratives of participant's lived experiences (Clandinin & Caine, 2012; Pace, 2021). Later I transcribed my reflections to fit in with the narratives of my participants.

4.4.4 After the Field Visit

After the field interviews and observations were completed in the middle of April 2021, I began working with my data and writing the narrative findings. Below I describe activities I adopted after completing my fieldwork.

Safety and Uses of Data and Consent Forms

The discussions with my participants were confidential, and I recorded them securely. I digitised hard copy materials consisting of interview transcripts, observational data transcripts, consent forms and audio recordings, and stored them safely on my Google drive and external hard disk drive. I securely stored the hard copy materials in a locked drawer. The information gathered from the participants was used for my thesis writing, and I might also use it for future research paper publications, book chapters, and conference presentations.

Transcribing Participants' Interviews

It took me nearly two months, ending in June 2021, to transcribe the interviews of all participants. I did the transcription in the Nepali language and later translated it into English to write the thesis. After completing the transcriptions, I asked my participants to review the transcripts and sign-off if they agreed. Most participants agreed with the transcripts, but some asked me to do minor revisions, which I incorporated. This signing-off process by participants is also termed member checking, which ensures the credibility of a research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Nowell et al., 2017). I transcribed all the interviews. I adopted a naturalised transcription, whereby participants' views are presented in detail as they are (Oliver et al., 2005); this ensures the trustworthiness of the research (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Analysing the Transcripts

After I had completed the transcriptions, I analysed all the transcripts in relation to my research questions. I adopted thematic analysis, placing the stories with similar meanings under a common theme. Each theme covered the ideas repeatedly appearing in participants' statements (Phoenix, 2008). I generated the thematic headings from the texts and categorised the storied texts under these headings. Grouping stories in larger headings helps the narrative analysis progress to the meaning-making stage (Boyatzis, 1998; Lehmann et al., 2019).

I adopted the steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2008) to thematise qualitative texts, which include: familiarising yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching the themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Similar to these steps, I marked the transcriptions in alignment with my research questions, scanned the applicable codes, brought those codes together to produce themes, merged more minor themes into bigger ones, named the themes, ensured similar stories came under a common theme, and developed a resonant thread of these themes into a narrative. A resonant thread of stories is used to make meaning in narrative inquiry research (Huber et al., 2018).

4.5 Ethical Concerns

I abided by the Ethical Application Form approved by The University of Waikato to conduct my field research. I received the written consent of every participant for the interview. As there was a fear of COVID infection, I conducted most of the interviews outside the school venues to minimise assembling people in the schools.

The positions and roles of Head Teachers are highly acknowledged in Nepali society and schools. In the field, their support was significant for me to undertake research in the selected schools and communities. They helped me to identify potential participants; however, I personally selected participants for the interviews. I acknowledged the power dynamics of my participants and tried to act as a neutral researcher. A top-down hierarchy exists amongst *Palikas* (local governments), Education Officers (bureaucracy), Head Teachers, teachers, and school staff in schools in Nepal. Party politics always influence the persons involved in school management and governance in Nepal (Hamal, 2020; Sharma, 2008). I worked as a neutral and professional researcher in the field, and I maintained my neutrality by asking open-ended questions instead of leading questions, asking neutral questions which were free from my conceptions, listening to participants attentively and probing their responses, and using neutral verbal cues while having conversations.

Likewise, I was aware of gender roles in Nepali society. I tried to maintain gender balance while selecting the participants, but this was not possible because I found most of the leadership roles in the SMCs, PTAs, Education Office, Elected Representatives, and Head Teachers were male. The participation of women in school governance in Nepal is not

encouraged due to the lack of an enabling environment for women and cultural factors that do not value women equally to men (Adhikari & Adhikari, 2021; Sijapati, 2019).

Similarly, my educated Hindu identity presented both opportunity and limitations in this research, which I acknowledged. I participated in Hindu worshipping events in schools, which made my participants feel that I was a part of their cosmos. During interviews, they openly shared their experiences on school governance. However, Hindu Dharma is often considered as a threat to religious diversity in Nepal (see Cailmail, 2008; Grossman-Thompson, 2017; Pariyar & Lovett, 2016; Upadhyaya, 2011). My identity limited my ability to fully explore the diverse viewpoints of indigenous communities and *Dalits*. Due to my power positioning, these groups were less critical when discussing their views on religious activities in schools. Nonetheless, I maintained my role as a professional researcher and faithfully narrated their views as expressed.

Additionally, I followed the rules of Nepal's Government regarding the COVID-pandemic. I travelled to Nepal from New Zealand in the middle of January 2021 for the data collection. I stayed in home isolation for 15 days as a part of COVID-related regulations in Nepal. While in the field, I used a facemask and hand sanitiser and maintained social distancing with participants when taking their interviews. Before every interview, I asked about the health conditions of my participants, and I recruited them for interviews if they were well and if they consented.

4.6 Trustworthiness of my Research

I made my research trustworthy by ensuring its “credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 300). I established my research's credibility through in-depth interviews, prolonged engagements, probing of the stories, and participants' sign-off. I used interviews and observation of participants' activities as methods to collect field information. The use of multiple sources for gathering evidence and its interpretation in research help to ensure the credibility of the study (Stahl & King, 2020).

I assured the transferability of my research by collecting a thick description of the field scenario through stories of the participants and embodying the theoretical insights. I maintained dependability by following the systematic research process. This included: clarifying

my positionality in the research, presenting the argument through evidence from literature, exploring the gaps in the literature, choosing the methodology as guided by my argument and literature gaps, collecting the data from the participants, narrating the data, and meaning-making (Creswell, 2002, as cited in Hossain, 2011). In order to assure confirmability, I made the meanings from the data collected through interviews with my participants, observations of their engagements in schools, and reviewing the Nepal government's education acts and policies. I managed to reduce my bias of the research through fair participant's selection, presenting the rich narrative findings I collected, and interpreting these narrative findings on the basis of my experiences, literature, and theories (Noble & Smith, 2015; Smith & Noble, 2014).

4.7 Chapter Summary

My methodology chapter showed my initial research plan, the COVID-pandemic situation, and my travel back to Nepal and carry out face-to-face interviews. Narrative inquiry is the appropriate methodology in my research to explore lived experiences of school stakeholders. Interviews and observation were the methods I used to collect narrative findings in the field, where I interviewed forty-three participants at three schools in Lalitpur. I received the support of liaison persons through which I interacted with school stakeholders and conducted the interviews. I transcribed the interviews to progress towards the meaning-making. My research followed the ethical approaches approved by The University of Waikato. This chapter has detailed the plan I adopted to complete the research. Part Two of my thesis that is presented in Chapters Five and Six, contains the narrative findings. The participants' stories contain their lived experiences of working in Lalitpur schools, which provide the evidence to explore school governance in Lalitpur.

Part Two

Storytelling on School Governance

Part Two is the story telling section in which I present the stories of my research participants in relation to their experiences working in school governance. My research adopted narrative inquiry methodology to collect lived experiences of school stakeholders [refer to Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework, pp. 39-59]. I conducted my field work during the COVID situation in Nepal in the months of February to April 2021. In this Part, I bring the stories of forty-three participants who were locals, parents, teachers, Head Teachers, Education Officers, elected representatives, and students in the three selected schools in Lalitpur. I also included my observations about the people involved in this research and the physical land scape on each research site.

While bringing the participants' stories from the field, I was careful to enrich the information from three perspectives: sociality, temporality, and place (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). I acknowledged the power relationships of my participants and tried to act as a neutral researcher. I examined the role of Hindu culture in the practices of school governance. The 2015 devastating earthquake in Nepal damaged over 7000 schools in the country (Nepal National Reconstruction Authority, 2020), and I found that many schools were under construction during my field visit. In 2020 and onwards, the harsh COVID situation claimed the lives of thousands of our beloved ones, and the education sector was significantly affected due to the prolonged closure of schools. The information related to school's geography in urban, semi-urban, and rural locations helped me to construct meanings on people's personal and social lives.

This Part consists of Chapters Five and Six. The former addresses the first research question: What cultural and social values of groups and communities in Lalitpur, Nepal, encourage working for school governance? The latter addresses the second research question: How do political influences shape group and community involvement or otherwise in school governance in Lalitpur, Nepal? In these chapters, I have categorised participants' stories into themes, and each theme covers the ideas repeatedly appearing during interviews.

Table 1 shows the details of participants I interviewed in three schools in Lalitpur. These participants represent a range of roles in school governance, and their stories are presented in the next Chapters Five and Six.

Table 1 School- wise Pseudonyms and Categories of Participants with their Roles

Schools	Participants	Roles
Sahar ko school	Ms. Paleti	Education Officer
	Ms. Chup	Elected Representative
	Mr. Naya	Head Teacher
	Ms. Nitu, Mr. Shanti, Mr. Social, Mr. Nepali	Teachers
	Mr. Dhani	SMC Chair
	Ms. Didi	PTA Chair
	Ms. Sital, Mr. Tahara, Mr. Tailor, Mr. Neel	Parents
	Mr. Hakki	Local
	Three boys	Students
Semi-Sahar ko school	Mr. Curri	Education Officer
	Mr. Party	Elected Representative
	Mr. Dhyan	Head Teacher
	Mr. Social teacher, Mr. Dada	Teachers
	Mr. Neta	SMC Chair
	Mr. Bahun	PTA Chair
	Mr. Mate, Ms. Parent, Mr. Chaudhary	Parents
	Mr. Ghar, Mr. Tea shop owner	Locals
Gau ko school	Mr. Paschim	Education Officer
	Mr. Boss (who is also the SMC chair)	Elected Representative
	Mr. Purba	Head Teacher
	Mr. Hotel, Mr. Pandit, Mr. Purano, Mr. Tall, Mr. Doko	Teachers
	Mr. Boss	SMC Chair
	Mr. Bike	PTA Chair
	Mr. Khawa and his wife, Mr. Sharma	Parents
	Mr. Tamang	Local

Chapter Five

Social and Cultural Values of Lalitpur's Locals in School Governance

In Nepali public schools, the school governance structures such as School Management Committees, Parents-Teachers Associations, and Alumni involve stakeholders from the community, parents, and local governments. In my research, these stakeholders' stories show how their values have helped shape their school engagement. I have presented these values as narrative findings to determine the cultural and social values of groups and communities in Lalitpur, Nepal that encourage working for school governance.

In this chapter, I have depicted narratives on four values of stakeholders in school governance. Firstly, I found that the communities were proactively engaged in establishing schools in Nepal after the 1951 democracy. There were political, social, and philanthropic reasons to mobilise communities in developing education. In the present context, people do not need to open a school; instead, they voluntarily gather and support the school management and explore local finances to make schools resourceful. The value of philanthropism has been passed on to communities by them taking local guardianship of schools. Secondly is the value of 'us', which promotes a collectivist culture amongst school stakeholders and unites them to develop schools. Thirdly, I explored the influence of the Hindu religion in school governance, as Hinduism connects local's cultural sentiments related to schools. Lastly, there exist conservative values of stakeholders such as social class divisions, patriarchy, and local supremacy in performing school governance roles. These conservative values are unhelpful in promoting sound and inclusive governance; however, they are a reality in Nepali education.

I have organised this chapter into four thematic headings: community engagement in public schools, school- community relationships, religion and education, and orthodox mindsets. I now move on to the findings on community engagement in schools to show how the community's support systems existed in earlier Nepali society after 1951 and how it continues now.

5.1 Community Engagement in Public Schools

Using the sharing of my participants, I explored how communities were engaged in developing school education after the downfall of the Rana regime in 1951. The earlier generations' legacies followed through to the philanthropic values in the present society that encourage contributing to school development. The findings related to community engagement in schools are presented next.

5.1.1 Community Support Systems of Schools: Memories

After democracy emerged from the Rana rule in the 1950's, school education became the prime agenda of national development in Nepal (Parajuli, 2015). Communities were active in building schools, managing teachers, and arranging all educational requirements. The first education act was prepared in 1971 to centralise school authority to the central government (Pradhan et al., 2019). Communities were informally working to establish schools and taking care of their management as there was no provisioning for SMCs and PTAs. Public schools were only established for local students, and parents and communities supported these schools wholeheartedly. In this historical context, my participants in the *Sahar ko school* and the *Gaau ko school* recalled their memories to explain how the community's support systems existed in the growth of school education.

The Sahar ko school: Established by a Youth Club

In 1974, Nepal was governed by the autocratic Panchayat rule. One incident happened in the locality where I reside in an urban settlement in Lalitpur. A team of twenty-one youths formed a Sunrays Youth Club for community development purposes. Mr Hakki became the Chair of the club, and they completing a number of social works, such as street cleaning, temple painting, and creating plantations. There was not any school in the settlement, so the club planned to establish a school on government land. The youths started seeking donations from locals in the community to build a small school and locals excitedly contributed cash and labour support to lay the school's foundations. There was a community self-help organisation, *Guthi*, which is a traditional saving and credit institution. It financed 1200 Nepali Rupees for the club to establish the *Sahar ko school* in 1974. All the students were locals, and the teachers were the

youths from the club. The community's financial support was minimal, so the school was in poor condition as there was no support from the government.

The school building was a straw-roofed hut with walls cemented with mud and brick. There was no drinking water for the students or teachers. Mr Hakki, the first SMC Chair of the school and his wife, would bring a bucket of water to the school every morning. The children were taught during the daytime, and adults would gather at night to discuss how they could support the agitations of political parties against the Panchayat. My mother remembered her days during the 1970s, "After cooking meals in the evening, we would go to the school to talk about the political developments and cruelty of the Panchayat rulers. Sometimes party leaders would come and teach us about democracy." The *Sahar ko School* served as the focal point for the youngsters' efforts to educate the populace about their democratic rights in opposition to the Panchayat. These activities happened at night to prevent action from the police as it was illegal to organise any gathering against the Panchayat rulers.

Another exciting story of Hakki begins now. It was in December 2021 that I entered the *Sahar ko school's* premises to see the martial art training of the students and community children. The school gate was opened, and children arrived at the playground wearing Taekwondo suits. As I was watching the activity, I suddenly remembered a water tank built 30 years ago by a benevolent person, Mr Hakki. As Hakki is my neighbour, he had previously shared with me about his work in the school. I excitedly approached the water tank in the school's backyard, but the tank's condition was in a poor state, seemingly having been left uncared for a long period of time. The plain wall of the tank was covered with grass, and the taps were broken. The place was turning into a waste dump with the construction materials of the school. To the side of the tank constructed by Hakki, I saw two plastic tanks donated by an NGO and a water treatment plant built by the Soft Water Company. The names of the NGO and the water company were put on the walls.

I encountered a man, Mr Smiley, in the restroom nearby the Water Treatment Plant. He asked me if I was from the Soft Water Company and if I was there to check the status of the water plant. I talked to him for a while and shared my identity with him. He sells jars of water at the school's shop. I learned that the Soft Water Company had installed a water treatment plant

so students could drink safe water. The school had contracted Mr Smiley to sell surplus water in jars to community members and deposit the earnings into the school's account.

I tried to focus my brain on the water tank built by Mr Hakki, although I found it was no longer in use. I could see the stone plaque with some inscriptions on the wall of the older water tank. Although the script on the plaque was discoloured, I could read the writing which revealed that Mr Hakki had built the tank in the loving memory of his late father. The writing said:

In the memory of Late Shri Mr Buwa.
His wife Mrs Aama and son Mr Hakki built this water tank.
This is inaugurated by the Mayor of Lalitpur Sub-Metropolitan, Mr Rana Shrestha.

February 3, 1993, Saturday

The plaque's writing revealed the social support system of the school some thirty years previously. I realised that the *Sahar ko school* had almost forgotten the benevolence of a person who had been kind to the school. He intended to provide fresh drinking water to teachers and students. This water tank, which was built by a local three decades ago, contained many untold stories of politics, power dynamics, economics, and societies. Hakki shared an incident on February 3, 1993, at the *Sahar ko school*. He said:

In the early years of the school, there was no drinking water service. As my house is nearby, my wife and I used to bring water in *gaagro*⁸ every morning for the students and teachers. My wife used to get 200 Nepali Rupees per month for work. We saved these earnings to build the water tank at the cost of 22000 Nepali Rupees. In order to inaugurate the tank and see other community development works, the Mayor of our region Mr Rana Shrestha was invited. An enormous mass was gathered at the *Sahar ko school* on the inauguration day, February 3. As an SMC Chair, I also got to speak a few words. I addressed the mass, saying:

“Mayor Saab⁹! I heard that our King Birendra had once visited a village to see the agricultural production there. From the helicopter, the King saw green farmlands with fresh cauliflowers. The King was very pleased to see the hard work of the people. Unfortunately, while the helicopter returned the same route in the evening, the King saw all cauliflowers upside down. The King realised that everything was faked to please him. This is the same condition in this school today. You have come to inaugurate this water tank, and it is filled now. However, you

⁸ A metal bucket to keep water. This bucket is usually carried on the shoulder by men or hips by women.

⁹ Honourable

may not know I purchased a tank of water at 700 Nepali Rupees to fill this new tank. Tomorrow onwards, who will fill the tank?" Why do not you provide a regular water supply to our school? (Mr Haki, First SMC Chair, Sahar ko school)

The speech by Mr Hakki in front of a big crowd expressed the dissatisfaction of youth against the Panchayat rulers in Nepali society. Public schools were not the priority of the government, so the community had to engage in school development proactively. Despite the country's political and bureaucratic chaos, communities were selflessly active in taking care of public education. Mr Hakki's courage made the Mayor and other political leaders think about the school, so some months after the incident, the government installed a separate drinking water pipe in the school. Mr Hakki's story provides us with a picture of society, and education's status in the past. Nowadays, I meet Hakki, already 70-years old, at a temple in our settlement every morning. He remembers the bygone days and says,

This stone goddess in our temple never speaks to us. However, we contributed our youth, money, ideas, and labour to the start of the Sahar ko school and gave the name of this goddess to the school [the school is named after a Goddess]. Now the goddess speaks through the voices of children studying there. We feel blessed.

(Mr Hakki, First SMC Chair, Sahar ko school)

These words of Mr Hakki revealed to me the people's priority towards education by establishing schools and building school infrastructure. People acted selflessly to open schools or help others get a good education. The following section presents the findings related to the establishment of the *Gaau ko school*.

The Gaau ko school: Stories of Land Donation and Labour Contribution

In 1960, the *Gaau ko school* was established by locals at the Dukeh settlement in a rural village in Lalitpur. After a couple of decades, villagers discussed shifting the school to the border of Dukeh and the *Khaldo* Bazaar to benefit the students of both settlements. After a lengthy discussion, the school was shifted to a temple's public land. Gradually the number of students increased, but the school could not be upgraded from Grade Eight because of its small land area. The villagers started searching for public land to re-site the school. Meanwhile, the school received a small amount of government aid to construct a new building; however, villagers

could find no suitable land on which to build it. Later, a kind person, also a teacher at the *Gaau ko school* from the village, donated his land at the *Khaldo Bazaar*. Finally, a new school building was constructed in 1980. Afterwards, the school was promoted to the secondary level, and students started to attend the SLC¹⁰ exam at the school.

A photo of an older adult wearing a garland was hanging on a wall of the Head Sir's office at the *Gaau ko school*. The photo has some writing that indicated it was of the person who donated his land to the school in 1979. The school recognised his generous deed of land donation by keeping his photo in the Head Sir's office. The donor had passed away, but his son Mr Jagga was the teacher at the *Gaau ko school*. I interviewed Mr Jagga, who expressed:

In 1979, my father was the acting Head Sir of this school. At that time, the school was running up to Grade Eight at a temple's premises. Everyone discussed and agreed to upgrade the school to Grade Ten. However, the school building was very old and small. The school area was also small. At that time, my family had a plot of 800 square meters at the *Khaldo Bazaar*. My father donated the whole area of land to the school for construction and class upgrading.
(Mr Jagga, Teacher, Gaau ko school)

A school that runs up to Grade 10 is essential for a community in Nepal. Grade 10 is the final year of schooling education; however, this provision has been revised in the present context¹¹. Only students who complete grade 10 can enter colleges and are eligible to apply for government jobs. Even still, the prevailing traditions in our villages mean many girls get married to their families after completing the grade 10 examination. Thus, our past communities had done their best to upgrade their schools to Grade 10 so that their children need not have to leave the villages and go to the cities to complete schooling education.

The story of the construction of the *Gaau ko school* does not end here. The villagers were united to do tasks related to school construction. There were no good roads and transportation services to carry construction materials from the city to their village, so the villager carried bricks, wooden logs, zinc sheets, cement, iron rods, stones, sand, and everything required from the nearby city. In the 1970s, it would take several days to complete a single trip

¹⁰ School Leaving Certificate (Grade 10) exam is a national exam to complete schooling education. This is now renamed the Secondary Education Examination (SEE).

¹¹ The 2019 Nepal National Curriculum Framework has mentioned grades 1-8 as basic schooling education, and grades 9-12 as secondary schooling education. Previously grade 10 was considered as the final year of secondary schooling education.

from the nearby city to the *Khaldo* Bazaar. However, the villagers' dedication turned their dream of constructing the school building into reality. The villagers now had a secondary-level school in their community, thanks to the efforts of local people who laid a good foundation for the development of schooling at the *Khaldo* Bazaar in Lalitpur.

5.1.2 Philanthropic Values to Support Schools: Present Context

Some of my participants' experiences reveal that philanthropic values motivate them to support public schools. In Nepal's public schools, stakeholders such as locals, politicians, locally elected representatives, and Education Officers gather to help their schools as a part of their social responsibilities or gratitude towards the schools. SMCs and PTAs act as legitimate community platforms to help these schools, and there are informal support mechanisms for schools, such as Alumni and Advisor Committees which help with local resource mobilisation. Philanthropic roles of the SMCs and Alumni in two different schools are discussed as follows.

The SMC of the Sahar ko School: Making Schools Better

In terms of my position in relation to the *Sahar ko school*, I have worked as a teacher and administrative assistant in a public school in Lalitpur, through which I learned about public school administration, school-community relationships, and several teaching-learning approaches. The *Sahar ko school* is situated close to my house and my profession as a teacher has inspired me keep an eye on the school's progress. The 2015 earthquake in Nepal turned out to be a transitional point in the development of the *Sahar ko school's* infrastructure. The earthquake damaged over 7000 schools in the country (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2015a). In the aftermath of the earthquake, the Nepal Government prioritised safe learning environments for new school buildings or retrofitting older ones (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016b). In relation to the school building work and support of communities, I talked with my research participants at the *Sahar ko school*.

My first interview was with Mr Naya, the Head Sir of the *Sahar ko school*. My identity as a former teacher and a local helped me to develop a good rapport with Mr Naya during our telephone conversations. I also asked one of my friends, Mr Shanti, the school's computer teacher, to approach the Head Sir. The support of Mr Shanti was quite helpful during my fieldwork because he was a liaison person in the *Sahar ko school*. In the school's premises, I

could see ongoing school building work and workers mobilised in large numbers. I saw two teachers were taking classes on the veranda of the older building. I guessed that the open-air classes were arranged as a preventive measure arising from the COVID pandemic; however, it also could have been due to the unfinished construction work of the new school building. As I entered the gate, on a chair close by, I saw a teacher wearing a purple Kurta Salwar as formal dress sitting and observing students who were playing. I approached and greeted her and shared the purpose of my visit to the school. She replied that she was a teacher and that the Head Sir had gone to the Education Office but would be back in the afternoon. I decided to wait there until he returned.

COVID's indirect effects and the preparations that had been made were visible in the school's environment. I could see that few students were present on the day, which may have been due to the fear of contracting COVID. All teachers and students had put on face masks, and a separate water tank with soap was sited at one corner for the regular washing of hands. The teacher shared that the school had remained closed for nearly ten months due to the first wave of COVID¹² and had recently opened in the third week of January 2021.

After having an informal talk with the teacher for half an hour, the Head Sir arrived at the school on his scooter. He was wearing a *dhaka-topi*¹³ and carrying a leathered side bag. His shirt's pocket was filled with red and blue pens, which signified his teacher's identity. In Nepal, teachers use red ink to check students' assignments. Everyone on the school's ground including me stood up from our places and greeted Namaskar to him. At first, he did not notice me, but I introduced myself and talked about my visit, which I had organised over the telephone. I understand that public-school Head Sirs are always stressed as they are loaded with work and might not remember all the (un)important things, but he welcomed me to his office which was on the top floor of a three-storey school building. As we climbed the stairs, there was a pin drop of silence in the classrooms. I could understand this as both fear and respect in relation to the Head Sir's presence. In his office, everything such as carpet, furniture, bookshelves, tables, and

¹² Lockdown due to the first wave of COVID was from March 24, 2020, to mid-September 2020 in Kathmandu valley. In November 2020, the Government of Nepal issued the 2020 School Reopening Framework to reopen schools closed due to the COVID. The second wave of lockdown was from April 29, 2021, to September 1, 2021.

¹³ A Nepali national cap

chairs were new. I sat on a sofa, maintaining some distance from him as social distancing was an essential protocol to keep everyone safe from COVID infection. He asked me about my community's perception of the *Sahar ko school* which delighted me as our discussion started with the purpose of my research in exploring the community's value systems in school governance. I commented:

My community's people have been positive towards the *Sahar ko school* in recent times. The students coming to the school are neat, the teachers are regular and punctual, and the school management team comprises *Lahure*¹⁴ people. People are also impressed by the new school buildings which the government has recently built. Earlier, there was a wide communication gap between the school and the community, but now the trust of the locals towards the school has increased.

As the Head Sir listened to my positive words, I could see how delighted he was. He was a new appointee and seemed cautious about the local people's support for the school. He expressed his worries that locals stopped enrolling their children in the school. As a local, I understand that the public school's educational quality is very poor compared to that of private schools, and I know that public school teachers and management teams are engaged in party politics and that this situation harms a school's overall academic environment. There is less chance of achieving good jobs for public school graduates as they lack necessary life skills, such as computing and English language proficiency. As a result, many graduates from public schools go abroad to do menial work as labourers. However, these negatives do not mean I do not admire public education; rather, I firmly believe that public education should be improved. It is a bitter truth that the poor academic performance of public schools is acknowledged by the reports of the Nepal Ministry of Education (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2020b, 2021). Parents know that private schools are profit-oriented, but they are often compelled to choose these schools for their children's better future.

Amid these negative insights towards public education, I observed a different situation at the *Sahar ko school* which was impressive. I saw new school buildings, classes upgraded to grade 11, good teacher numbers, increased student numbers, computer and science labs, and a library. This encouraging scenario in the school made me curious to learn more about the

¹⁴ Retired Indian, British, or Singapore army officials, who are sincere, rich, and active in social activities

students, the roles of parents, and the broader community support in the school. I continued talking with the Head Sir, who explained,

There are three categories of students at this school. Firstly, some locals have enrolled their relatives' children, such as cousins, nephews, and nieces. These children mostly come from villages to help their relatives who own city houses. They assist the family in domestic work, and the family admit them in this free public school. Secondly, some children live with their parents, but their family's economic status is not good. These parents mostly migrated from villages and live in rented accommodations in the city. They are engaged in menial jobs such as construction labourers. Thirdly, some children come from foster homes. These foster homes take guardianship of needy children and help them with accommodation, food, and education.
(Mr Naya, Head Sir, Sahar ko school)

Mr Naya agreed that most of students belonged to impoverished backgrounds, so their parents could not contribute to the school's management work. However, the school seemed to be making physical and academic progress. The interaction with the Head Sir and observation of the school's environment, changed my general preconceptions that public schools were under-resourced in terms of management, educational quality, and infrastructure. Accordingly, this made me more curious as to what is the role of community in the school if parents are unable to give time and managerial support to the school.

The *Sahar ko school* has a PTA team which has been led by Ms Didi for over a decade. I spoke with her about the school management team and activities in the *Sahar ko school*. She expressed her views on parental roles.

At present, Dhani dai¹⁵, Kep dai, and Luv dai are active members in the SMC. Dhani dai is a retired government officer, and the others are *lahures*. They all live close to the school. If these people were not on the committee, it would be difficult for the school to make progress. Only guardians are not efficient in bringing substantive changes to the school. As you know, all the children in government schools are from low-income families. The children from labourer's families and domestic child workers study here. Their parents cannot contribute to the school. Wealthy families do not enrol their children in public schools.
(Ms Didi, PTA Chair, Sahar ko school)

All three leading persons in the SMC are dai (males) and well-off persons in the urban settlement where the *Sahar ko school* is situated. These affluent people in the SMC have no

¹⁵ A respectful word for an elder brother.

children enrolled in the school, but they selflessly come to contribute and stand for the growth of the school and students. The SMC was representing the local sentiments in the school, and the teamwork of the school administration and the SMC has resulted in significant achievements through work divisions between teachers and locals. The Head Sir of *Sahar ko school* explained:

Unlike parents, the SMC is very active. I look after academics whereas the SMC undertakes all the ongoing construction of our school buildings. The SMC Chair scans the market to find the cheapest construction materials and identify contractors who can work at a low-priced rate. He fairly records the details of every expense. He never misuses the school's resources; instead, he lends personal support to the school if needed.

(Mr Naya, Head Sir, Sahar ko school)

The SMC in the *Sahar ko school* comprises well-respected and wealthy persons who have political influence in the region. Moreover, they are often retired, and thus they can give enough time to support the school administration voluntarily. Everyone in the *Sahar ko school*, teachers, Head Sir, and parents who I spoke with were happy with the role and activities of the SMC. This also could be why the current SMC Chair has been serving in the school for the last two decades. The SMC Chair and its members have the skills to administer the school from management to infrastructure development. Some years back, the SMC Chair had also lent money to the school for upgrading from the fifth standard to the eighth¹⁶. Mr Dhani disclosed:

If my team were not engaged in this school, the school would never have been upgraded to the secondary level. I have provided 150,000 Nepali Rupees to upgrade it from grade 5 to 8. No parents came forward to support money at that time. [Laughing] Until now the school has not returned me that money.

(Mr Dhani, SMC Chair, Sahar ko school)

The kindness of the SMC Chair to lend money to the *Sahar ko school* was praiseworthy. The SMC supervised the construction of buildings even during the COVID pandemic in 2020 and 2021. It assisted in building a concrete playground containing poles for basketball in the middle of the school, and the school area was fenced on all sides. The SMC was successful in bringing donor funding to install a sound drinking water system. Some years ago, being a resident, I could see the poor condition of the *Sahar ko school*; there were insufficient classrooms, few

¹⁶ In Nepali schools, classes are categorised as pre-school, basic (grades 1-8), and secondary (grades 9-12)

and irregular teachers, a poor student enrolment rate, and an undedicated management team. These situations have been amazingly transformed, and credit must go to the SMC led by Mr Dhani. The PTA Chair elaborated:

I have been serving as the PTA Chair of the school for the last decade. At that time, my elder daughter was studying in grade five, and now she is at her bachelor's level. Back then, the condition of the school was poor. Very few students were studying here. The school building was only one story and was made of mud, bricks, and a zinc sheets roof. Public buses would come to the school ground for parking as it was open and bushy. Anyone could enter the school premises as there were no active committees to take care of the school. The school had not received permission to teach above the fifth standard. Even thieves broke the school two times. (Ms Didi, PTA Chair, Sahar ko school).

Recently, the *Sahar ko school's* physical development and academic progress have been visible. One of the reasons for these improvements is the dedicated SMC team and their philanthropic engagement—the SMC and PTA members receive no economic benefits from working in the school. The SMC has also established a welfare fund to help students from poor economic backgrounds. Mr Dhani revealed:

We have established a welfare fund in our school. We have thought of providing scholarships to needy students through that fund. We are planning to register it in the local administration office. I have also contributed money to the fund and even asked my relatives to donate and help the poor children. (Mr Dhani, SMC Chair, Sahar ko school)

The deposit in the *Sahar ko school's* welfare fund has reached 350,000 Nepali Rupees. Thanks to the benevolent efforts of the SMC and teachers, this fund will help needy students in the school. In conclusion, parents who migrate from villages to cities have insecure economic conditions, and this situation keeps them busy earning a living performing menial activities. To offset this, some well-off people in urban localities voluntarily support public schools through the SMCs.

The Semi- Sahar ko school: Alumni as Philanthropic Agent

The *Semi- Sahar ko school* is located on the outskirts of the Setidevi municipality, and there are farmlands and community forests near the school. Recently, the government has

widened and blacktopped the road to access the school and its adjoining settlements. In the region where the school is situated, caste groups *Ghimire, Poudyal, and Dalit*¹⁷ have lived for a long time; however, migration of people from outside districts has recently increased this municipality's population. People prefer to migrate to the Setidevi municipality as it is comparably easier to make a living there than in major cities, such as Kathmandu. The other reason is political. From 1996-2007, the decade-long Maoist conflict and the Terai- Madhesh¹⁸ movement were political events in Nepal that displaced people from their villages to the cities (Khatiwada, 2012; Singh et al., 2007). As a result, public schools in the cities started to have migrant students. This is a probable reason why the *Semi- Sahar ko school* has many students from outside the locality.

In the *Semi- Sahar ko school*, one-third of the students enrolled are locals, while others are from outside the municipality. This figure helped me to predict that the school lacks local students and possibly the support of local communities. The school's *smarika*¹⁹ mentioned that two decades ago all the students were locals, and the school was the first choice of students from all the adjoining settlements. The school even had an established alumni association; however, the alumni remained dysfunctional because of the lack of the team's dedication, weak leadership, and limited vision. In 2019, the school's stakeholders realised the alumni's importance and reformed the former students' network. I talked with Mr Dada, who is a teacher and former student of the school. He described his roles in the alumni and its activities. He recounted:

Nearly two decades ago, the alumni were formed and registered by some ex-students. It had gathered some funds also. Nevertheless, it remained passive for a long time. Three years ago, we initiated the reform of the alumni. Being a teacher here and an ex-student, I related to many ex-students. The Head Sir also asked me to revive it, and we formed a new committee. We plan to re-register it soon in a government office to make a network of all the ex-students working in different sectors in Nepal and abroad. Recently, the alumni painted the school building for 60,000 Nepali Rupees. Alumni is a jewellery for our school.

(Mr Dada, Teacher, Semi- Sahar ko school)

¹⁷ Highly discriminated and so-called untouchable caste groups in the Nepal

¹⁸ Nepal's southern belt that adjoins with India

¹⁹ A book recalling history of the school

After listening to the views of Mr Dada, I determined that the alumni model was crucial in reuniting former students to the school and developing a network of helping hands. The idea of alumni formation in a school was new to me. I completed my schooling at a private school in Lalitpur, where there was no provision for such alumni. Since I completed schooling (grade 10) in 1999, my classmates have not formally gathered. The teaming up of former students was neither initiated by the students nor promoted by the school administration. Sadly, my school, which was established in 1986, operated until 2015 when it was shut down due to financial reasons. Private schools can often face an economic crisis because the profits and losses of the institution are solely dependent upon investors. However, public schools are backed by the government, so funding is guaranteed. In addition, the findings regarding the alumni were interesting for me because the *Semi-Sahar ko school* had explored a creative idea of resource generation. I met and talked with Mr Party, who is an elected representative of the Setidevi Municipality. Mr Party commented:

The alumni were formed with a noble intention of love towards the school. The students who grew up here and learned *ka kha*²⁰, cannot forget their school. We can bring a big change here if we collect tiny drops of help from everyone.

The ex-students are at various positions in the professional world. They are engineers, doctors, army personals, bureaucrats, and others. Some of them are in influential positions to bring funds to the school. If everyone's ideas and contributions are harmonised, we can develop the school quickly. That is why we reformed the alumni and are preparing its regulations to register it in a government office. Through the alumni, we organised picnic programs for getting together. We even arranged a program to honour our former teachers. We have planned to establish a fund to support hardworking students in the school.

(Mr Party, Ward representative, Setidevi Municipality)

It is evident that the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, which was established seven decades ago, has produced thousands of graduates working across different sectors. Alumni reconnects these ex-students and provides updates to them on the school's growth. In Nepal, alumni are not recognised by any educational laws. However, this practice is adopted by some schools as an essential means of developing a social network and generating resources. Mr Curri, the

²⁰ Nepali alphabets

Education Officer of Setidevi Municipality, also expressed a similar concern on the government's response to alumni:

Government rules and regulations in Nepali school education do not recognise the alumni model. From a resource mobilisation perspective, alumni are very effective in the present context. If a school's management team and administration acknowledge the strength of alumni, the alumni's influence is extensive. As a school grows, it will have a more significant number of graduates. These might have attained good positions in society, business, and job sectors. Their social networking and income will also be good. These graduates are the property of a school, and we can develop a network of these people for the school's progress.
(Mr Curri, Education Officer, Setidevi Municipality)

Alumni help to develop a social platform for past students to reconnect, chat, and intensify their past relationships. Furthermore, alumni help gather local funding for developing small school infrastructures. The motives of these students to engage in school activities are selfless and philanthropic. The finding that follows next is related to the 'value of togetherness' in Nepali society, from which school stakeholders collaborate to help public schools.

5.2 School-Community Relationships of 'Togetherness': The Value of 'Us'

Nepali public schools are financed and administered by the Government, and the schools are locally managed by the SMCs and PTAs. In my research, I found that collaborative governance among school stakeholders exists through the 'value of us'. The *Sahar ko school* has network of outsiders who represent political parties and government. The *Semi-Sahar ko school* has good relationships community members, parents, teachers, and previous students [refer to Chapter Two: Literature Review pp. 14-15, for meanings of outsiders and insiders]. The *Gaau ko school* values two-way relationships between the school and its communities. In the context of schools' relationships with communities, I present the narrative findings in each of the three schools.

5.2.1 The Sahar ko School: Collaboration with Outsiders as a Needful Approach

I witnessed an exciting experience at the *Sahar ko school* in February 2021. As I entered the entrance gate, I noticed a temple of Goddess Saraswoti at the left corner. Behind the temple was a big stone plaque on which there was a list of more than a hundred people and

some benevolent organisations who had donated money to the school over the last two decades. My eyes were stuck there for a while. The plaque was written in Devanagari script²¹:

The following people and organisations donated money and goods to the Shri Sahar ko school. Their contribution was used for fencing the compound, building an underground water tank, installing sanitation pipes, constructing school rooms, reconstructing old school buildings, and upgrading the school from primary to lower secondary level.

Name lists of donors:

Government, SMC, and the working committee (12 names)

General people and organisations (91 names)

Inaugurated by: Mr Sham Pandit, A Member of Parliament

January 9, 2007

The named list of the donors included retired army personnel, teachers, a sports centre, a member of parliament, social workers, businesspersons, a women's group, a second runner-up of Miss Nepal contest 200[...], an iron workshop, a private school, an advocate, and many others. I guess these wealthy donors had not enrolled their children at the school; however, they collectively acted to develop the infrastructure and upgrade the classes in which many underprivileged children were studying. The stone plaque at the *Sahar ko school* was a symbolic representation of community togetherness to promote public education by Nepali communities.

The Nepali Government supports public schools by recruiting teachers and staff, paying their salaries, building infrastructure, providing scholarships to underprivileged students, organising midday meals for students up to grade 5, and funding daily administrative work. In addition, schools receive support from local well-wishers, including financial resources and participation in school management. As a former public-school teacher, I have also experienced that a public school gets support from governments, communities, and NGOs. Ms Chup, an elected representative, presented her views about external support to a school as follows:

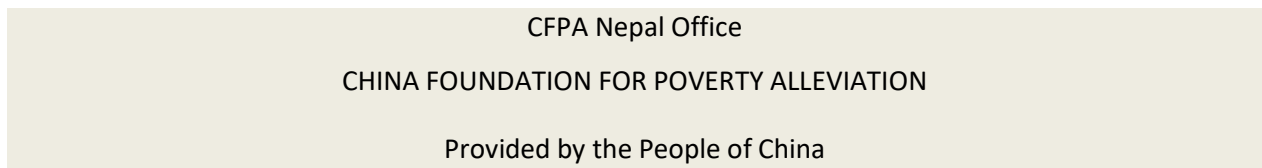
The feeling of ownership towards a school motivates a community to engage and help the school. The government's budget is hard to receive because we must arrange several documents and follow harsh bureaucratic procedures. Meanwhile, the Ward Office also allocates the budget to schools. The support of NGOs depends upon their project plans, which may not relate to the school's needs. A public school needs everyone's support.

²¹ Nepali language is written using Devanagari script

(Ms Chup, Elected Representative, Patan Metropolitan City)

Ms Chup's assumptions signal that a school cannot operate by itself financially and morally; instead, there needs to be coordination between the community, government, and NGOs for the holistic development of a school. She further added that the community's vigilance should always be at the centre when bringing in and utilising funds to a public school. She believed a public school got regular government support, but more funds are needed to deliver quality education. In private schools, there are often good buildings, libraries, educational and play resources, computer classes, science labs, subject-related teachers, and the school environment is usually English-speaking. The government hardly spends any money on these components in public schools, and these schools cannot be sustained through a stand-alone approach. As a result, they rely on external sources to provide for the educational needs of students.

NGOs are at the forefront of helping schools and students. I want to share a short conversation I had with a student of the *Sahar ko school*. In December 2021 at half past 3 in the afternoon, I was walking through the market area close to the *Sahar ko school* when I saw a small boy in the school's uniform carrying a blue coloured bag. I noticed his bag because it was heavy, and his body was leaning forward. Suddenly, my eyes locked onto the label on his bag on which was written:



The logo of the CFPA Nepal Office and the details indicated above were printed on the boy's bag. The bag interested me, and I walked with him and talked for a while.

- Me:** Hello *bhai*²². How are you? You study at the *Sahar ko school*, right?
- The boy:** [smiling] Yes.
- Me:** Do you know your school's computer teacher, Mr Shanti? He is my good friend.
- The boy:** Sorry, no. I read in grade 3, and we do not have computer classes.

²² Small brother

- Me:** Oh! I see. That is fine. By the way, your bag looks nice. Do all the students in your school have this type of bag?
- The boy:** No, some have blue, and some have red coloured bags. One day, some people came to our school and provided bags, lunch boxes, and water bottles to every student. There was a big program in our school on that day. They were nice people.
- Me:** So lovely. Nice talking to you. (The boy reacted through his smile and the conversation was over)

The conversation made it clear that a Chinese organisation had donated some essentials to students of the *Sahar ko school*. Children were happy with the goods they had received, and the school administered the donation program. In general, collaboration with outside stakeholders has benefited the *Sahar ko school* by improving its education through infrastructure, upgrading of the classes, and providing support to needy students.

5.2.2 The Semi- Sahar ko School: Collaboration Amongst Insiders

In March 2021, the dismantling of an older building was taking place at the school's premises. As I entered the school gate, I saw a few people sitting on a long bench and discussing documents. I greeted Namaskar to them and asked where the office of the Head Sir was. They kindly pointed towards the first floor of one building. I thanked them and moved to the Head Sir's room where Mr Dhyan warmly welcomed me to his school. He was checking the home assignments of students. We made some informal conversation and had tea at the beginning of our meeting. Mr Dhyan asked me how I was able to identify his room. I replied, "I met some people on the ground who might be the teachers. They showed me your room." "Oh, nice! These people regularly come to school. They are not our staff and teachers." said the Head Sir.

Mr Dhyan took me towards the window and showed me a mature man with a long and bushy moustache. Dhyan said, "The moustached guy is a member of the SMC, and others are parents. They are reviewing the purchase bills related to the ongoing school building works". Coincidentally, the moustached guy saw us, and he waved his hands. The Head Sir also replied to him doing Namaskar. The scene was a fantastic example of the collaboration between the

school, parents, and the SMC. The Head Sir was busy in his office checking copies of students' work, teachers were taking classes, and the SMC and PTA members had gathered to inspect the construction activities. Everyone in the school was busy with their work, but all of them seemed connected to each other. In the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, multiple stakeholders were engaged to support the school's growth. SMC, PTA, Alumni, and Advisor committees had different responsibilities in the school, as Mr Dhyani stated:

Every one of stakeholder works for the sake of the school. There is a student Alumni, Advisor Committee, SMC, and PTA. While making any major decision, all the stakeholders or key persons from all committees participate and contribute. If there is involvement of all stakeholders, everyone will take ownership of the decision and activities. When a community feels that the school belongs to them, they come to inspect and support the school activities even when the teachers are not in the school.

In addition, we have formed an advisor team of socially renowned persons who do not represent the SMC, PTA, and Alumni. The school advisors are primarily senior citizens from the community, and they have tremendous life experiences. Their suggestions are helpful for our school in making significant decisions.

(Mr Dhyani, Head Sir, Semi-Sahar ko school)

This coordination amongst locals, parents, and former students in the *Semi-Sahar ko school* shows how team efforts work better for a school. These stakeholders own the school development activities and perform their supportive roles with dedication.

5.2.3 The Gaau ko School: Reciprocal Relationships with Communities

I recall a day of my fieldwork at the *Gaau ko school* in April 2021. The day was Saturday, a public weekend holiday in Nepal. The two Ward Offices in the Kalidevi Rural Municipality and a local youth club had jointly organised a volleyball tournament at the school's playground at the *Khaldo Bazaar*. It was the final competition day of the tournament and there were six participating teams from the neighbouring settlements. The school ground was surrounded by hundreds of spectators. As a sports lover, I watched the game as I sat in one corner of the stadium. The game was also an opportunity for me to observe the relationship between the school and the community, as the community's youths were using the school's ground for the competition.

I could hear the 'dang-dang' sound in the playground after the players spiked the volleyball. Dust was rising from the ground when players would run to dig the ball. The crowds were cheering to support the players. Some youths were also busy watering the ground to make it dust free. There was a giant banner kept informing attendees about the event and the donors. Meanwhile, I got a chance to talk with some of the observers including teachers of the *Gaau ko school* who sat on a long bench. I learned that a local teacher at the school, Mr Tall, was also a renowned volleyball player in the region and had coached hundreds of students. I approached him and greeted Namaskar. He replied Namaskar to me, and we began talking about the match. He was a former student of the *Gaau ko school* and had been teaching there since 1987. "Many of the players in this competition are the graduates of our school", he shared. He further recalled some memory of the ground:

Some years back, the playground's surface was sloppy, gravelled, and covered with *Ghangharu*, a local thorny grass. Our school reconstructed it and made it plain. On this ground, our students perform regular sports activities, morning prayers, and assembly. The adjoining community uses this ground for playing and other social activities. This ground belongs to everyone. There is no other ground in this region to organise such big events. Although this ground lies in the school's premise, the community need not have to pay money to use it.

(Mr Tall, Teacher, Gaau ko school)

I became fascinated to hear about the role of the playground in binding the *Gaau ko school* with its community. I continued watching the match on the playing field. Although the day was windy it was sunny, and a large crowd from the region was gathered at the school. Journalists were covering the event, police were providing security to the area, and an ambulance was standing by at the school gate to help people if any medical event occurred. I heard announcements from the mike controller, who repeatedly thanked the donors and helping hands of the event. He stated:

We are thankful to Mr [...] and Ms [...] for sponsoring prizes for our players. Thanks to the Area Police Office for security. Thanks to the Health Centre Office for medical and health support. Our special thanks to Mr Purba Sir, the Head Sir of *Gaau ko school*, for helping with physical support to organise the event.

(An MC, Volleyball competition, Gaau ko school)

The *Gaau ko school* supported the event by providing school amenities, such as the playground, stage, toilets, desks and benches, mike and speakers, electricity supply, and water. Many of the players and the event arranger were students at the school. The local youths and the organisers kindly acknowledged the help from the school. I was intrigued by the reciprocal relationships between public schools and communities.

The following findings are about the religious value of Hinduism that connects the cultural sentiments of schools and communities. My findings present how schools celebrate Hindu functions, such as Saraswoti puja, and the importance of the idols of Goddess Saraswoti on school premises.

5.3 Religion and Education in Nepal: A Nexus?

As a former school teacher, I have experienced that most Nepali public schools are named after Hindu deities and have temples of the Goddess Saraswoti. Students recite for Hindu mantras at every morning assembly and worship the Goddess. I have experienced that there is a nexus between Hinduism and schooling education in Nepal. In my research I have found that Hinduism in schooling education connects with communities, creates an atmosphere of peace in schools, and helps to create harmonious school communities. The Saraswoti puja event, an idol of Saraswoti in a school, and diverse religious sentiments embody three thematic findings which I gathered from the schools in my study.

5.3.1 Saraswoti Puja Event at the Sahar ko school

In Hinduism there is no single god, and the Goddess of education is Saraswoti. The Saraswoti Puja²³ which is also known as Basanta Panchami or Shree Panchami, was celebrated on February 16, 2021 in Nepal where it forms part of the Hindu calendar. Basanta is a spring season, and Basanta Panchami day is believed to end the winter season and welcome the spring. On that day, schools, and other educational places, organise the worship programs of the Goddess Saraswoti. Due to its religious value, parents start the formal education of their children on this day.

²³ Worshipping Goddess Saraswoti

On this day, I had planned to visit the *Sahar ko school* to witness the Saraswoti Puja. At around six in the morning, I entered my mother's room to serve her a cup of tea. She was resting on her bed and listening to the radio. My mother has a small Chinese radio on which she listens to the morning bhajans²⁴ of gods. I could hear the radio was broadcasting the news relating to the Saraswoti Puja, which I quickly recorded on my mobile. The news anchor read:

Namaskar! *Subha Bihani*²⁵. This is Radio Nepal. The effect of COVID-pandemic is gradually declining in our country. [...]

Other news: Today, Nepali people are worshipping the Goddess of Education-Saraswoti. From today, the movement of the Sun shifts towards the North. Days will be longer, and the spring season begins in the country. This is the holy day for children to begin their education. Today teachers, students, artists, writers, singers, dancers, and every knowledge seeker worship their pens, copies, brushes, and tools. Devotees go to different Saraswoti temples to worship and seek blessings from the Goddess. Buddhist people also celebrate this festival by worshipping the idol of the Saraswoti. This festival symbolises religious harmony [between Hindus and Buddhists] in Nepal.

On Saraswoti Puja festival, Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli expressed good wishes to the country's people, saying, "There shall be social and ethical values established by which every individual shall get enlightenment and knowledge. To bless people's lives with happiness, we must uplift our society through moral and ethical values".

(A news anchor, Radio Nepal, February 16, 2021, at 6:00 am Nepal time)

Radio Nepal is the Nepali government's broadcasting. The news clip on the radio shows how a cultural practice is embodied in human lives and that political system acknowledges the cultural sentiments of its peoples. Saraswoti is the Goddess of education and the Saraswoti Puja²⁶ festival shows how educational values and religious values are connected in Nepal.

I attended the Saraswoti Puja celebration at the *Sahar ko school* which was open to all. Students, teachers, and a maid had already arrived and were decorating the ground and the idols of the Saraswoti. In one corner, a speaker was playing the *bhajans* of the Goddess. The Head Sir was coordinating the event, and I observed him making phone calls to invite the SMC

²⁴ Holy songs

²⁵ Good morning

²⁶ Worship

members and the elected representatives to school and have *prasad*²⁷. I was silently standing at the playground and observing the program. The Head Sir engaged me by asking me to write '*Shree Ganeshya ya Namah: Akshyar Arambha*', which means '*Hail to Lord Ganesh: Beginning of the education*', on a whiteboard kept near the idol of Saraswoti. Lord Ganesh is always acknowledged and prayed to first in every Hindu ritual. The board was left blank so the names of the worshippers who would come to the school could be recorded. There is a belief that if we write our names on the board or walls of the temple of the Goddess Saraswoti, the Goddess will enlighten us with knowledge.

Gradually, the *Sahar ko school* playground filled with excited children in colourful costumes. After some time, a Nepali subject teacher went upstairs and started chanting the Sanskrit mantra of Saraswoti through a speaker. The mantra was "*ya devi sarbabhute...*". The mantra is a salutation to Goddess in Hinduism. He added:

Dear students! Today we are celebrating the Saraswoti puja. Today is also the birthday celebration of Vyas Rishi²⁸. Today is the Basanta Panchami. At every religious place, people go to worship Saraswoti. Devotees throng the Tileswor temple in Lele, Lalitpur. [...]

Respected [Dear] Guardians! You are most welcome if you plan to admit your children into our school.

(Nepali subject teacher, Sahar ko school)

The mantra chanted by the Nepali teacher continued for a while. The Head Sir and other teachers were busy putting red *tika*²⁹ on the foreheads of students with blessings. The blessings to the students were: be a good human, study hard, respect your teachers, and fulfil the dream of your parents. A computer teacher was snapping photos of the event. Afterwards, the Head Sir and some other teachers approached the idol of Saraswoti. The Head Sir took off his leather shoes and belt, leathery materials being banned in Hindu temples, washed his hands, and joined the others to pray to God, according to Hindu practice. Some other teachers did *arati*³⁰ with flame and incense to produce a pleasant smell. A teacher was ringing the *ghanta*³¹ to

²⁷ Holy food that contains *fruits, and sweets, such as halwa and Jeri*

²⁸ Writer of the Hindu holy book Mahabharata and other epics

²⁹ A colourful mark made on the forehead

³⁰ Worship

³¹ A kind of bell which is used to worship gods

make an auspicious sound. Everyone bowed in front of the idol of Saraswoti, did puja, and put on a tika and prasad. After the teachers finished their puja, all the students lined up and worshipped God. I also followed the students and did the puja. These activities are a part of Hindu ritual prayers, which I observed on the day.

After the puja was completed, teachers and some senior students were ready to distribute prasad to students and community people who were present on the school's premise. Many community children accompanied by their parents arrived at the school to worship the Goddess. Teachers were busy managing the students. Sadly, I could not see any parents coming to admit their children to school on that day. The crowd of the locals in the *Sahar ko school* was gradually increasing to worship the Saraswoti, including the Ward Chair arrived who went straight to the temple to pray to the Goddess. Afterward, he joined the gathering of teachers and started talking with them. Meanwhile, I could hear two teachers gossiping by saying, "In Nepal, a Ward Chair's position is the most durable one. The Prime Minister can be replaced by majority votes, but it is almost impossible to remove a Ward Chair". Afterwards, the Head Sir put tika on the forehead of the Ward Chair by saying, "This year again, also your party may trust you and give the election's ticket to the Ward Chair." The Ward Chair smiled and put tika on all the teachers' foreheads. The Nepali teacher came closer to the Ward Chair and said:

There is a high chance that you (the current Ward Chair who belongs to a democratic party) will win in the upcoming election in 2022. The opposition communist party has been splintered into four groups. It is so good for you.

(Nepali subject teacher, Sahar ko school)

The Ward Chair said nothing to the teachers and expressed his silent diplomacy by listening only. He attended the program briefly, had informal conversations with teachers, received the prasad, and left the school. He did not choose to visit the ongoing school construction works. The arrival of the Ward Chair, his interactions with teachers, the Head Sir asking him to put tika on the forehead of all teachers, and the gossiping of the teachers helped me to understand the power dynamics of the Ward Chair in public schools in Nepal. The religious gathering offered an environment of talk amongst stakeholders in the *Sahar ko school*.

The environment of the school was completely religious. Simultaneously, the works of the new school building were ongoing, and I could hear the irritating sound of wood cutting. At around 11:00 am, the Saraswoti puja program ended and the remaining school hours were declared a holiday. The school gate remained open as some locals were still arriving with their small children to worship the Goddess. All teachers and students were delighted to attend the puja, take prasada, and receive blessing from the Goddess. Afterwards the teachers went to have breakfast at the local teashop, to which I was also invited.

5.3.2 Saraswoti's Temple in a School: Religious Value in Education

My participation in the Saraswoti puja festival in the *Sahar ko school* intrigued me to explore the importance of the temple of Goddess Saraswoti in schools. Every public school in Nepal has this temple, which is also a symbolic representation of the Hindu religion. I talked with different participants to explore the temple's significance.

The Sahar ko School: Having a Temple is the Continuity of Cultural Legacy.

Ms Chup is an elected representative in the urban settlement where the *Sahar ko school* is situated. She represents a Dalit community, which is a so-called untouchable caste group in Nepal. She won the 2017 election as a Ward Committee member in the Dalit-women quota representing the Communist Party of Nepal-UML. The 2015 Constitution of Nepal allocated mandatory seats to socially disadvantaged groups such as Dalits to represent local governments (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2015). Being a Hindu, a Dalit activist, and a communist party cadre, Ms Chup presented her mixed views regarding Hindu temples in schools. She shared:

I do not have blind faith in God, but I respect our cultural practices greatly. Sometimes if we are in trouble, we ask help from God. This belief system is our cultural foundation. We should not destroy everything in the name of modernisation but protect our identity. Our social value is vital because we still follow these supernatural things.

The tradition of worshipping Saraswoti's idol in Nepali schools is from the ancient period. Hindu-Nepali people have immense devotion to Saraswoti. At the Shree Panchami festival, we begin the reading and writing of our children. These are our cultural legacies that are more worthy than materialistic development.

(Ms Chup, Elected representative, Patan Metropolitan City)

Ms Chup is now an elected representative of all caste groups in the Ward. She believes that our cultural inheritances are our identities that tie our society in harmony. Ms Paleti, the Education Officer of the Patan Metropolitan City, agreed with Ms Chup's view. This Officer believed that having an idol of Saraswoti in a school makes the school's environment blissful and compassionate. She told me:

Saraswoti is a goddess of education, and every human has a desire to be educated. If a school has a Saraswoti temple, children will worship her. Faith towards God is believed to stop evil happenings in a school. The students will become disciplined as they fear God invisibly looks after their deeds.

(Ms Paleti, Education Officer, Patan Metropolitan City)

"An idol of Saraswoti will stop evil things in a school," said the Education Officer. This view made me further curious to explore the association between a god's idol and no evils on the school's premises. If no evil happens in a school, it is a sign of good governance. The finding that follows next is related to the Saraswoti's idol at the *Gaau ko school*.

The Gaau ko school: A Temple Makes School's Environment Positive

At the *Gaau ko school*, the construction work of a new building was in progress. The Saraswoti temple was dismantled due to ongoing work, and the school was planning to build another one.

A retired teacher at the *Gaau ko school* expressed his view towards the temple. He explained:

An idol of Goddess Saraswoti in schools should be taken positively. I will give you an example. Some people do not listen to the morning news because most of the news contains negative contents such as bad politics, accidents, killings, rape, and others. This negative news will remain in our brains until the evening. Alternatively, if we see the Saraswoti in the early morning, our whole day becomes pleasant and positive. It is all about our trust and belief.

(Mr Purano, A retired teacher, Gaau ko school)

Mr Purano views that the Saraswoti's idol contributes to making human lives bright and blissful.

Another teacher of the *Gaau ko school*, Mr Pandit, shared the importance of the temple of Saraswoti. He remarked:

We are blessed to have a Saraswoti's idol in our school. We organise the puja of Saraswoti as an annual tradition. For the last 32 years, I have been taking the lead in organising this festival. I recite the Sanskrit mantras during the festival, and everyone follows me. We have faith in our God. I feel happy that all teachers and students gather on the day to celebrate. I hope students will learn this tradition and preserve it for the next generation.

(Mr Pandit, Nepali sir, Gaau ko school)

Pandit's narrative indicates that it is the responsibility of the upcoming generation to carry on traditional societal values. It is also good to learn that teachers take leadership to preserve the culture associated with Saraswoti's temple and the puja. I was getting more enlightening views from my participants in relation to the Goddess's spiritual energy and its effect on creating peaceful learning environment at schools. In the discussion, the SMC Chair of the school put forward an interesting example:

In Nepal, the temple of Goddess Saraswoti at a school is a strong and unique culture. In the USA, we read in news that people shoot open fires in schools and colleges and kill hundreds of students. We call it a massacre, and it frequently occurs in developed countries. These developed countries call themselves civilised, but many such incidents in schools and universities have proved them merciless and inhumane. The case is different from ours. We fear that the Goddess is looking at karmas- our good and bad deeds. Our faith system towards God never encourages our children to be violent in schools. Therefore, this type of massacre never happens in Nepali schools.

(Mr Boss, SMC Chair, Gaau ko school)

Mr Boss's narrative means that the religious values of Nepali people make the school's environment safe and peaceful, and such a learning environment ensures sound school governance.

Semi-Sahar ko School: Religion is a Political Card

There is a political reason behind the influence of the Hindu religion in schools in Nepal. A *Semi-Sahar ko* teacher explained why most schools are named after Hindu deities. He stated:

Previously, Nepal was a Hindu kingdom. We have been adopting Hinduism for many generations. Most of the schools were opened after the 1950s. At that time, all the Kings, Prime Ministers, and ministers were Hindus. Schools are sacred, so their names were kept after the Hindu deities.

(Mr Dada, Teacher representative in SMC, Semi Sahar ko school)

Nepal is a secular country; however, Hindu traditions are practised in schools. Mr Dada views that the domination of Hinduism in the education system is due to the political influences of past rulers. Nepal has been a Hindu Kingdom for a long time, and kings were regarded as the

reincarnation of the Hindu God-Lord Vishnu (Awasthi, 2004). The influence of Hinduism is also seen in keeping the names of public schools with Hindu Gods and Goddesses.

5.3.3 Diverse (Religious) Sentiments in Schools

The narratives of some of my participants revealed the dominance of Hindu dharma³² in schools, so I talked to some students and parents who do not follow Hinduism. The following findings relate to the sentiments of people with other religious values.

The Sahar ko School: 'We are Christians, Sir!'

This narrative section is the follow-up of the Saraswoti puja day at the *Sahar ko school* on February 16, 2021. It was the midmorning of the puja day, and I was observing the participants who were coming for the puja. Suddenly my eyes went to one corner, where two boys were gossiping and watching the puja from a distance. The Nepali subject teacher saw the boys and asked if they had prasad. One of the boys replied, "No sir! we have just arrived, and we do not put tika". Nepali sir took it as usual and began talking with me on a different topic. He revealed:

Sir! last year eleven new students were admitted on this day. This year no one has come to admit it yet. Why is it happening? This may be due to our poor publicity to reach our deserving students.

(Nepali subject teacher, Sahar ko school)

I just listened to the Nepali subject sir. I agree that public schools needed more effective communication and marketing skills in enrolling new students. At my settlement, I could see many pamphlets and posters of private schools regarding free admission on the Saraswoti puja day. The *Sahar ko school* had not done any such initiatives and advertisements. After a while, the Nepali subject sir again asked the two students to have the prasad. The students refused his request, saying, "No thanks, sir!". I was interested to know why the two students repeatedly denied the tika and prasad, and why they were silently standing at one corner of the playground. I went closer to the boys and had a short conversation:

³² Religion

Me: Hello, boys. How are you? I am a friend of your computer teacher. He invited me to attend this puja. He is very busy today. Does he teach you also? In which class do both of you study?

Boy (A): Yes, he takes computer classes for us. We read in grades 7 and 8.

Me: Nice. By the way, why have you not put tika today?

Boy (A): We have just come to see the program. We are Christian, sir. We cannot take prasad and put tika.

Me: Oh, I see. That is fine.

Finally, I learned why the two boys were not participating in the celebration. I talked with them for a while, and they shared with me their childhood memories at the *Sahar ko school*. I excitedly listened to their stories of student lives and their aims after graduating. Despite their religious indifferences, I witnessed the children keenly watching the puja event. They seem so connected with every activity relating to the event.

Some days before the puja, I had talked with Ms Sital, who was the parent of a student at the *Sahar ko school*. She belonged to a Dalit community and was a Christian. She had a different view regarding religion and education in the school. A few years ago, her family migrated to the urban settlement where the *Sahar ko school* was situated in Lalitpur. Due to personal reasons, her family left the settlement and shifted to a different place. Her children had also stopped going to the *Sahar ko school*. She told me:

We follow Christianity. We weekly go to the Baptist church at a settlement in Lalitpur. In our children's former school [*Sahar ko school*], they had to attend different Hindu functions. Even teachers would ask our children to bring money to celebrate the Saraswoti puja. However, it was not compulsory. I never sent money with my children. Instead, I would ask them to go and watch the functions but not take prasad and tika.

(Ms Sital, Former parent, Sahar ko school)

Ms Sital was very cautious about the religious practice followed in the school. She did not wish her children to follow the rituals of other religions. Regarding the influence of Hindu religion in the school, the deputy Head Teacher of the Sahar ko school described:

If there were any other idols of a Hindu god in the school, I would consider it a problem. Saraswoti is the Goddess of education and is acknowledged by all religions. Children fear the

Goddess and perceive that they should not walk on immoral paths. The Goddess has spiritual energy that alerts and motivates students. During exams, students worship the Goddess hoping to get a good result. While walking by the Saraswati's idol, we join our hands, close our eyes, bow down, pray quickly, and show respect. This prayer gives us mental peace. Other religious students do not worship the Saraswati idol but attend school functions that are not compulsory. (Ms Nitu, Deputy Head Teacher, Sahar ko school)

Ms Sital's view was a silent resistance against the influence of Hinduism in schools. Ms Nitu perceived it as a usual happening in a school. The people having faith in one religion have the right to practice their rituals or not follow others, and a positive aspect of the *Sahar ko school* was that teachers did not force students to contribute money for the Hindu pujas.

Interestingly, nine months after celebrating the Saraswati Puja in the school, I observed another festival celebration. The day was December 24, 2021, and the school celebrated the Christmas festival. I was passing by the road of the school, and suddenly I saw cheerful students wearing red Christmas hats. The school's stage was decorated with balloons, colourful papers, and flowers, and some students had put on their ethnic and traditional dresses and were rehearsing dances and songs. Although I did not explore the Christmas celebration in the school in detail, I was encouraged to see the school's acknowledgement of religious diversity.

The Semi-Sahar ko school: The School Acknowledges all Religions

Religious activities in Nepali schools are not a feature of public debate yet; however, it is possible that other religious groups are dissatisfied with the celebration of Hindu festivals in schools. In this perspective, a teacher in the *Semi Sahar ko school* also shared similar experiences:

In this school, Hindu students are in the majority. Christian students are also increasing, which we realised during the playground's morning assembly. In the assembly, we ask students to do the Saraswati bandana³³. The Christian students join hands but do not utter the Hindu mantra. When we ask why they remain silent, they reply that they are Christian. During the Saraswati Puja, Christian students attend the function but do not put red tika on their forehead and worship Hindu gods. In our community, most of the locals from the Dalit groups have converted their religion to Christianity.

(Mr Dada, Teacher representative in SMC, Semi- Sahar ko school)

³³ chanting.

Christians in Nepal do not follow Hindu rituals. In Nepal, the conversion from Hinduism to Christianity is commonly seen amongst socially disadvantaged groups. Dalit groups perceive the adoption of Christianity as their resistance to caste-based discrimination in Hindu societies (International Labour Office Nepal, 2005; Pariyar et al., 2021). Minority religious groups in Nepal, such as Christians, can exercise their religious rights; however, in schools, praying and worshipping the Hindu Goddess Saraswati are considered formal rules during the morning assembly for students.

Some other respondents shared with me that having the idol of Saraswati in schools is not a big issue. The Head Sir at the *Semi Sahar ko school* told me:

Saraswati is regarded as the Goddess of knowledge in our culture which is guided by our Hindu philosophy. There is no social dissatisfaction about having Saraswati temple on the school premises. Although our school has religiously different children, we have not heard any odd saying regarding the Saraswati's temple yet. I agree that it is a sensitive issue, and someone can raise it.

There are various faith-based schools in the world. In Nepal, the majority religion is Hinduism, due to which Hindu practices may have been applied in schools. We should not be limited in such debates. It does not mean that we should force other religious children to adopt Hindu values. We should not make it a big issue. In case of such an issue arise, we must resolve it. (Mr Dhyan, Head Sir, *Semi- Sahar ko school*)

Mr Dhyan believed that having the idol of Saraswati in a school, and students and teachers worshipping the Goddess is a faith system that must be acknowledged. Hindu traditions are practiced in schools in Nepal with the influence of Hinduism being seen in retaining the names of public schools with Hindu Gods and Goddesses. In this regard, the Education Officer of Setidevi Municipality tried to give scientific reasoning for keeping Saraswati's temple in schools. He stated:

I disagree that if there is an idol of Saraswati in a school, all good happens, and education will be better. If so, then why do we need schools and teachers? However, I agree that there are some sacred powers in the Hindu religion. If we chant the 'Om' mantra three times, it increases our concentration, brings peace to the mind, and relieves us from stress.

My main concern is how we perceive and use knowledge. Saraswati is attached to our feelings. By doing puja, yoga, and meditation, our thought becomes positive and hopeful. In our Eastern philosophy, there is a relationship between education and Saraswati. These days, people

celebrate imported cultures, such as Valentine's Day and the English New year. Saraswoti puja is our homegrown culture, and we must preserve it.

(Mr Curri, Education Officer, Semi- Sahar ko school)

Mr Curri's thoughts echo that people celebrate foreign traditions to become modern, but they hesitate to celebrate their traditional festivals. The celebration of Saraswoti puja in schools helps to preserve Nepali religious identity and cultural values. However, participants believed that the Hindu celebration in schools should acknowledge the diversity of other students.

Gaau ko school: Saraswoti is Common to All

In Kalidevi Rural Municipality, the *Khaldo* bazaar settlement comprises 40% Tamang people and 60% Bahun, Chhetri, and Dalit people. Tamang is an indigenous community in Nepal, and they dominantly follow the Buddhist religion. I talked with a parent of the *Gaau ko school* who followed the Buddhist religion, although he saw no issues in celebrating the Saraswoti puja in the school. He explained:

This year my son attended a marriage function at our neighbour's house on the day of Saraswoti puja. So, he missed the program at his school. We, as Buddhists, do not hesitate to take part in such pujas. When I was a child, I would celebrate the puja by attending the school's functions. Ironically, many people are converting their religion to Christianity these days. Many churches have been opened in our village in the recent period. Christian children do not take part in the Saraswoti puja in schools.

(Mr Khawa, Parent, Gaau ko school)

Mr Khawa felt free to celebrate Hindu pujas in schools As Buddhism and Hinduism are synonymous in Nepali society. A retired teacher in the *Gaau ko school* presented a fact:

Tamang people do not hesitate to worship during Saraswoti puja. There is not any discrimination between Hindu and Buddhist religions. While organising *Saptaha*³⁴ at the Local Shiva Temple, Buddhist people also go to celebrate. Christian people are very few in our locality. Christian students do not celebrate Saraswoti puja, but they attend the program. They do not put tika on the forehead and do not take prasad. We are aware of the religions of such children so that no one would discriminate against them.

(Mr Purnao, A retired teacher, Gaau ko school)

³⁴ A Hindu religious puja and gathering for seven days in which pundits explain the holy books

Buddhist people have no objections to celebrating Saraswoti puja and having an idol of Saraswoti in a school, and Christian people simply skip the puja event in schools but do not express major dissatisfaction with such Hindu functions. This is a symbol of religious harmony in Nepali society. The SMC Chair in the *Gaau ko school* told me:

Having the Saraswoti temple in schools is never an issue in our society. We should not provoke that this is a Hindu temple, then where is the Buddhist's one? Saraswoti purely represents the Goddess of education. She is an icon of knowledge.

I think people have misinterpreted that she is a Hindu Goddess. She is common to all. Unfortunately, some people converted their religion to a new one and expressed extremism in this religious factor. We do not have such issues in our school yet.

(Mr Boss, SMC Chair, Gaau ko school)

Discussions with the participants reveal that having an idol of a Hindu Goddess and celebrating a religious function in a public school was not a problem. The participants who followed Buddhism acknowledged and were comfortable with the traditional Hindu practices in schools. In the case of Christian students, they had problems worshipping the Hindu Goddess, putting on a red tika, chanting Hindu mantras, and eating prasada. However, some of them excitedly attended these Hindu functions in schools.

In this chapter section, I explored the scenario of Hindu religious values in public schools and tried to show its nexus with school governance through community involvement and a peaceful school environment. The following section considers the conservative values of local people who work in school governance. Although these values seem negative in the performance of sound school governance, they exist in school stakeholders' social and cultural lives.

5.4 Orthodox Mindset?

In the three schools in Lalitpur where I undertook this research, I found that socially affluent people were dominant in the SMCs, whereas parents were mostly from the unprivileged class. Moreover, there was a practice of patriarchy in school governance which limited the roles of women. The locals misused the school-related power to control the school's administration, teachers, and resources. In relation to these orthodox values, I present discussions under the thematic headings: *poor students and wealthy managers*, *patriarchy*, and

local supremacy. The narrations under these themes differ in each of the *Sahar ko*, *Semi-Sahar ko*, and *Gaau ko schools*.

5.4.1 Poor Students and the Wealthy School Managers

I found that public school parents remain busy earning a living due to their impoverished circumstances. Consequently, they cannot give time and expertise to the schools. These parents rarely attend the SMC meetings to present their views. The SMC Chairs and its members are primarily non-parents, and socially and politically influential persons in the community. It looks like a contradictory situation when public school's managers have not enrolled children in the public schools they manage. This situation in public schools distinguishes privileged classes as managers and poor classes as students and parents. I begin the findings related to the *Sahar ko school* with my personal story.

Migrant Parents Have Less Time for the School

In the 1970s, the *Sahar ko school* was established in Lalitpur's urban settlement where I also belong. There were no private schools during that period, so my father enrolled my older sister in the *Sahar ko school* in 1984. When I grew up, I used the Sahar ko school's grounds to play with my friends. Sometimes, we would take cows and goats for grazing in the school's playground, which was open. There was a small water canal, *Raajkulo*, passing by the school, where I used to play with paper boats with my friends. I still have nostalgic memories of the *Sahar ko school*. In 1987, there a private school opened in our region, and my father enrolled me and my sister in that school. At that time, many families from my settlement took their children from the *Sahar ko school* and enrolled them in the private school. I was unaware of why my father had enrolled us in a faraway school where teachers and other students were total strangers to me.

Gradually my frequency of visits to the *Sahar ko school* became less frequent. But as a local youth, I used to participate in the school's programs, such as donating books to the school library, planting trees in the school environs, and fundraising during the Tihar festival.³⁵ Nowadays, migrant children from my community are enrolled there. Every morning, I see them

³⁵ One of the biggest Hindu festivals celebrated for five days. People decorate their homes with lights. Children and youths go to other's houses to sing and dance (playing dheusi and vailo) and get money and food.

going to school wearing uniforms with white shirts, blue pants and skirts, red and blue striped ties, red socks, and black leather shoes.

I now understand why my father shifted my sister from a public school to a private school three decades ago. This is not only my experience but also that of all my neighbours, friends, and relatives who, as city inhabitants, choose private schools for their younger ones. It is hard to rely on public education due to the deteriorating educational quality, which is even acknowledged in the 2019 National Assessment of Student Achievement government report (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2020b).

Nevertheless, it is an undoubted fact that more than 80% of Nepali students are enrolled in public schools across the country. School Management Committees in every school comprise locals, parents, teachers, and elected representatives to take local guardianship of public education. Education is free in public schools. Despite these supportive policies and a larger share of public education in Nepal, locals in my settlement have not enrolled their children in the *Sahar ko school*. This may have impacted on student numbers in the school, but, in contrast, I found that the number of students in the *Sahar ko school* reached 300 in 2021, which is a good figure for a secondary level public school in an urban area. In relation to this, I talked with the deputy Head Teacher to understand the makeup of students who were enrolled in the school. Ms Nitu explained:

Most of our students work as domestic workers at rich people's houses. Some families are migrants and struggling due to their poor economic conditions. The poor families are engaged in daily earning activities as construction workers. Some children stay at hostels provided by a social organisation.

(Ms Nitu, Deputy Head Teacher, Sahar ko school)

Ms Nitu indicated that underprivileged groups in the community have opted for public schools. She verified my belief that no locals have enrolled their children in the school in recent years. Even so, many migrant parents trust the *Sahar ko school* to educate their children. This made me more curious to uncover parental views about their trust in public education.

Ms Didi, the Chair of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) of the *Sahar ko school* lived in her rented accommodation in Lalitpur. She is from a migrant Chaudhary family who have been residents in Lalitpur for the last fifteen years. Her husband and three daughters accompanied

her. She shared with me that she had enrolled all three daughters in the *Sahar ko school*, two having already completed their studies. Her husband worked at a petrol pump, and her oldest daughter was a teacher at the *Sahar ko school*. When I asked her why she chose the public school, she shared:

My family migrated to this place (the urban settlement in Lalitpur) fifteen years ago. I find this place far better than my village for educating our children. Our village's education is somehow good, but we cannot provide good care to our children. We are fully engaged in household chores and farming work from the early morning to the late evening. Our bodies get exhausted and managing time to care for children is hard. Opposingly here, even if we do the work as construction labour for the whole day, we have plenty of time to look after the children during the morning and evening. We can prepare them for school and see whether they have done homework or not. This helps us to maintain closeness with our children and keep an eye on them.

(Ms Didi, PTA Chair, Sahar ko school)

Ms Didi seemed quite satisfied with her decision to enrol children in a public school. However, her meagre living signalled that there could be many underlying reasons behind her contentment. I continued the interaction by asking her if she had felt any social pressure for opting for public schooling for her daughters. Ms Didi shared:

My neighbours (here in the urban settlement) frequently tell me that I must enrol my children in private schools for a better future. I replied to them that we could pay school fees for today and for tomorrow but not always, as we do not have good income and saving. If we do not pay fees in time, the private school will terminate our children. They will not allow the children sitting on the exam. These activities will psychologically torture the children. We will not have money all the time. Also, we have three children. That is why I have enrolled all my children in public schools.

Despite this, I am happy that my daughters have presented good academic progress. Now my eldest daughter is a teacher in the *Sahar ko school* from where she completed her schooling. I cannot say about others' children, but I am happy with mine. It depends upon the ability of students and how much time parents allocate for them.

(Ms Didi, PTA Chair, Sahar ko school)

Ms Didi's views denoted her mixed perceptions of her public-school choice. She agreed that private schools were wealthy persons' schools, and she could not pay the fees of such schools for her three daughters. At the same time, she was happy to share that, for her intelligent children, public schools were good enough. I assumed that her choice of school was associated

with her poverty and maybe one of the causes of her poverty was the number of children she had. I thought that she was expecting to have a son, which is a common hope in Nepali societies (Priya et al., 2012), but had given birth to three daughters. This signalled the association between the patriarchal structure and its association with human poverty in Nepal. Thus, having more children, poverty, and the choice of free public schools seemed connected in the story of Ms Didi.

Mr Dhani, a retired bureaucrat, had been the Chair of the *Sahar ko school* for the last two decades, despite having no children enrolled in the school. He was a locally renowned social worker in the settlement where the school was situated. Before meeting with the SMC Chair, I was informed by the school's administration that he had stopped meeting with outsiders to prevent COVID transmission. The administration suggested to me that Mr Dhani was an older adult who hardly came to school. I was told it would be challenging to convince him to be interviewed. As he was one of my important respondents, I did not want to miss the opportunity to talk to him about his school roles. Therefore, I contacted him and received his verbal consent for the interview. The telephone conversation was as follows:

Me: Namaste, Sir! How are you? I am Devendra. I am doing research on school governance in your school. The school Head Sir of the *Sahar ko school*, provided me with your number.

SMC Chair: Namaste. It is good that you have chosen our school. Is there any reason behind this?

Me: Sir, I am a resident of Nakhipot. In the last five years, I have seen big progress in your school, such as an increased number of students and new buildings. It is just my outside observation. So, I want to talk about the governance system your team (SMC) has practised and the local people's support of this school.

SMC Chair: That is fine. I will arrange my time for you. However, I am a heart patient, and I avoid going outside to crowded places during this COVID period. So, you have to come to my house. Regarding the time, I have my meal at 11:00 am, and then I become free. You may come at noon tomorrow.

Me: Sure, sir. Thank you for that. Can you tell me your address?

SMC Chair: Oh! You will need to come to Parewa Chowk, but I guess you will not identify my house easily. It is around 15 minutes on foot from the school. Please take the help of one teacher at the school.

Me: But sir, they might have classes during the daytime.

SMC Chair: Do not worry. I will talk to the Head Sir. He will manage one teacher to assist you.

(Telephonic conversation between me and the SMC Chair of the Sahar ko school)

The discussion with Mr Dhani over the telephone helped me to imagine the power relations in the school system. Since the COVID outbreak in March 2020, he had not stepped into the school until this research study was undertaken in February 2021. The construction work was going on at school, but he monitored the work from home. He could ask teachers to leave the class and help an unknown person (such as me) to be guided to his house. I duly considered his health condition and thought it would be better if he resigned from the post and handed over responsibilities to some other members. Later I found that he had an apolitical and rich status in society. He had decades of experience in bureaucracy and school management, so everyone accepted him as a neutral and capable leader in the *Sahar ko school*.

Mr Shanti, the computer teacher, accompanied me to the SMC Chair's bungalow house that had a beautiful garden, dogs, and a branded car. Mr Dhani seemed to be living a luxurious life at the age of 70. He welcomed us to his private office built in the house. The office was specially made for school management works such as keeping the school's files and purchasing bills related to the school construction and holding meetings with the stakeholders. In his house, he had applied all preventive measures for COVID, as he was aged and a heart patient. His office had a big table and two chairs on either side. The distance between the chairs was at least 2 meters to maintain social distancing. A bottle of hand sanitiser was kept on the table. He had put on a face mask. I talked with him for nearly an hour. We discussed several issues related to the roles of the SMC and his leadership in the *Sahar ko school*. I noted an interesting thing that revealed his value of working selflessly for the school for such a long period. He shared:

Here, many parents belong to the working class and are engaged in menial work. Why would these parents come to the school? They are busy with their earning work. Even some of our students work as domestic workers in other's houses. The owner of these children never comes to the school.

(Mr Dhani, SMC Chair, Sahar ko school)

Mr Dhani was doing philanthropic work for poor and needy students. Although he represented the well-off class, his perception of the parents did not include looking down upon them. The scenario raised a big question on the capability of parental leadership in the *Sahar ko school's* development. In this regard, I talked with some parents.

A parent Mr Tahara shared:

I work in the construction sector, and my wife works as a housemaid. We both are very busy from early morning until late evening. Although teachers send us messages to come to school for meetings, we never attend them. If we miss one day's work, we will lose earnings and the faith of our employer. This loss is very significant for my family's survival in the city.

(Mr Tahara, Parent, Sahar ko school)

Another migrant parent, Ms Sital revealed:

After coming from Dharan³⁶ to here [Lalitpur], we admitted our children to the *Sahar ko school*. During the initial days, the school invited us several times for meetings. Nevertheless, we skipped all the meetings due to our negligence and engagements in other affairs. Later, the school stopped calling us.

(Ms Sital, Parent, Sahar ko school)

Another parent, Ms Tailor shared:

I own my tailor shop. My husband has also newly opened a tailor shop in another settlement. We both are very busy. This is Kathmandu, and it is hard to survive here without enough money. It has been a long time since I have not been to my son's school. [...] I heard that the school is making a new building. I am unaware of who is helping to build it. The school has not asked for any contributing money from us. I also do not know who the SMC Chair is.

(Ms Tailor, Parent, Sahar ko school)

Mr Tahara and Ms Tailor talked about their busy schedules to earn bread and butter for their families. They hardly had time to go to their children's school. The focus of a migrant family on fulfilling basic needs was necessary and understandable. Ms Sital represented the Dalit community with less academic qualifications and holding migrant status. These social factors might have created sense of inferiority in her perceptions of attending school meetings. The Deputy Head Teacher of the school, Ms Nitu, further added:

We frequently ask parents to come to school and discuss on academic issues of children. However, parents do not have time to come to the school to discuss their children.

³⁶ A city in the Eastern region of Nepal

(Ms Nitu, Deputy Head Teacher, Sahar ko school)

The narratives of my participants showed that migrant and working-class parents mostly preferred the *Sahar ko school* but that local people did not wish to enrol their children in the school. Even caretaker families of the domestic worker children did not make to visit the school.

The Head Sir, Mr Naya described:

Many of our school's children work as domestic workers in others' houses. These (house owners) guardians are not worried about whether the students fail or repeat their classes. These guardians are concerned if the children will continue to work at their houses or not. These guardians rarely make school visits to discuss educational matters, collect progress reports, and inquire about the children's activities and behaviour. It is taken for granted that teachers are only responsible to look after students. So, there is no support from guardians for public schools.

(Mr Naya, Head Sir, Sahar ko school)

Naya's narratives were supplemented by another participant Mr Neel, a foster home staff member. Some of the *Sahar ko school* students were under the care of the foster home, which was financed by a Jesuit society. Mr Neel illustrated a compelling reason why the caretaker guardians did not visit the schools of their domestic workers. He shared:

A teacher told me that "the caretaker parents feel that if they go to the school of their domestic workers, their social prestige will lower".

(Mr Neel, A staff of a foster home, Sahar ko school)

This social taboo of lowering prestige discouraged caretaker families from visiting their worker's schools. The caretaker families had fulfilled the needs of their working children, but they were less concerned with the children's education. Ms Chup, an elected Ward member, is also a public school graduate and a resident of the settlement where the *Sahar ko school* is situated. I talked about local and parental roles in public schools. Her views about parental choice in selecting schools clarified the situation. She revealed:

Private schools have good management teams and can attract middle and upper-class students who can pay fees. In public schools, the students from low-income families are enrolled as they do not need to pay fees. This dual education system has become a class divider in our society. Out of several societal conflicts in our country, one is the class division among people due to the education they receive. If they receive a quality education, they will get good jobs and live decently; otherwise, they have to go abroad to do menial jobs as labourer.

(Ms. Chup, Elected Ward representative, Patan Metropolitan city)

From the participants' voices, I sense an interface of poverty, selection of schools, and class division in urban Nepali society. These scenarios suggested that students in the *Sahar ko school* were from poor backgrounds, and the people in the SMC represented the privileged class.

The Semi-Sahar ko School: School Needs an Influential SMC Chair

The *Semi-Sahar ko school* was established 70 years ago in Lalitpur. The school's alumni published a *Smarika* in 2019. The *Smarika* contained differing writings on the school's history, donors, former SMCs and PTAs, messages from educationists, and students' creative works. I scanned the name list of the former students who mostly had surnames Ghimire, Poudyal, Dalits, and Newars. These surnames of the students were in the majority until the 1990s. After that time, I found new students with surnames Chaudhary, Rai, Magar, Limbu, and Tamang were gradually enrolled. These new students migrated from different regions to the capital city of Kathmandu. This comparison helped me to predict the gradual delocalisation (not having local students) in the *Semi-Sahar ko school*. In a meeting, I asked the Head Sir about the local students in the school. He shared with me that only 30 per cent of the students were local, and the rest belonged to migrant families. This change in students' composition in the school intrigued me to explore more with some participants. I talked with a parent, Mr Mate, who shared:

I live close by the school and have got two children enrolled. Many people suggested me not admit children to this *high school*³⁷ and to look after a private school. I have a principle that "Good students will be good everywhere. No matter whether the school is private or public". My children are intelligent, so they perform well in this *Semi-Sahar ko school*.
(Mr Mate, Parent, Semi- Sahar ko school)

Mr Mate is a local who belongs to a Dalit community. As a parent, he was satisfied with the performance of the school. He admired the Head Sir's leadership in the growth of the school's education. He added:

Commonly, people look down on *high schools*. Before the term of the current Head Sir Mr Dhyana, the school had not made progress. Outsider people used to say that this school would

³⁷ A terminology used for public schools

collapse soon and turn into a cow shed. Most of the teachers were locals but they were uninterested in promoting this school. Slowly the older teachers got retired, and new ones arrived. Since Mr Dhyan came here, everything has been improving. Student enrolment has also increased. Educational quality has been improved. We have built new buildings for our children. (Mr Mate, Parent, Semi- Sahar ko school)

Mr Mate agreed that local students had lower numbers in the school and that migrants filled most of the seats. He applauded the Head Sir's leadership roles in transforming the school positively. Mr Dhyan also confessed that drastic changes had been made in the school in the last seven years. The 2015 earthquake was a breakthrough in bringing new building projects to the school.

Mr Dhyan is an extraordinary Head Teacher. I still remember that the first catchup with him was memorable for me. Although we were friends during our Master of Philosophy (M. Phil) study at Kathmandu University in 2017, I had not met him for a long time after we graduated. I had several telephone conversations with him before meeting physically at the *Semi-Sahar ko school*. On the first meeting day with him, as I entered the school gate, I saw an old building being demolished, and reconstruction activities were ongoing. Mr Dhyan was holding a water pipe and filling a tank at the construction site. In his other hand, there was a book. Later he told me that he was encouraging the construction workers and monitoring their work. I had a mental image: the duty of a Head Teacher with the books he held in one hand and the responsibility of a Head Teacher as administrator through the water pipe he had carried. Upon sharing, he mentioned:

History will reveal how much I have become successful. This school was also at the collapse stage when I joined as a teacher seven years ago. During that time, there were only 50-60 students; now, we have 230-240 students. After this new building work is finished, my full engagement will be on academic improvement. I aim to increase the number of students to 500-600.

(Mr Dhyan, Head Sir, Semi- Sahar ko school)

Mr Dhyan further revealed his belief in 'servant leadership', which encouraged him to engage in every activity in the school. The school had given priority to infrastructure development, which I could understand because excellent school buildings are essential to attracting students. He explained:

Infrastructure is the foremost thing for a school's development. The old school building, which is being dismantled, had the roof covered by zinc sheets. If we looked at it from a distance, it would view ancient and ugly. One of the locals even shared with me, "I was able to convince my son to study in your school, but my son saw the poor condition of the building; thus, he refused to join". Parents and children have seen significant buildings only in private schools, and they assume that such schools can only offer quality education.

(Mr Dhyani, Head Sir, Semi- Sahar ko school)

The Head Sir hoped to increase the number of students; however, there were few local students admitted. The well-off locals had their children in private schools. In this regard, I talked with two teachers about improving public schools and attracting students. One of them was a social studies teacher who expressed:

There are approaches to make public schools better and attract students. First, we need to begin teaching- learning in the English medium. Second, we need to show outstanding results in SEE exams. Third, we must gradually develop our branding to earn public trust and attract more students easily. Fourth, good school infrastructures are equally essential.

(A Social studies teacher, Semi- Sahar ko school)

The social studies teacher shared some essential criteria for making public education better in the present context. He believed that a public school has many issues regarding teaching-learning, infrastructure, and public relationships. An isolated effort by a single school is insufficient to bring about meaningful reforms, and it needs parental and community support. Later, I met Mr Bahun, the PTA Chair of the school who had enrolled three daughters and a son in the school. I questioned Bahun about parental perceptions towards private or public schools. He expressed:

Rich people have enrolled their children in private schools. People with fewer earnings and who belong to the so-called low caste have enrolled their children in our school. The low-caste students get scholarship funds here but not in private schools. We also have a midday meal program for junior-graded students. Students do not require to pay fee for the regular classes and pay minimal fees for extra coaching classes.

These provisions have attracted unprivileged students, primarily from outside the local community. However, the relation of the school with communities is cordial. When the school calls them, they come to a meeting and share their views. Head Sir has maintained good relationships with everyone.

(Mr Bahun, PTA Chair, Semi- Sahar ko school)

The *Semi-Sahar ko school* had different facilities for poor students, such as scholarship support, midday meals, and free tuition fees. Mr Dhyana confessed that the SMC Chair and members' role was significant in bringing new school-building projects from donors. The leadership characteristics of the Head Sir and the SMC Chair were vital in developing facilities in the school. Parents did not contribute to making the school resourceful and improving student facilities. The SMC was an important medium to connect schools with the community to get moral and financial support. The SMC Chair, Mr Neta, proudly shared several innovative approaches introduced in the school. He unveiled:

Students in this school are taking the Secondary Education Examination (to complete grade 10) since 1984. The pass result is impressive now. I feel that students are also very talented. I have even told the Head Sir that we have to arrange tuition classes for weak students before six months of the SEE. We focus on their hard study and good results.

We have added several things to our school. We have a karate class, scout, science lab, and computers for students. We have also reformed the Alumni of this school. We are constructing a big building budget of 70 million Nepali Rupees. All these changes have been initiated after I was nominated as the SMC Chair.

(Mr Neta, SMC Chair, Semi- Sahar ko school)

The SMC Chair of the *Semi-Sahar ko school* was selected by the Setidevi Municipality Office based on his political and social identity. He owned a big house, a department store, and a big piece of land in the nearby bazaar. His only son was a doctor. The Chair was engaged in the school as a social worker. Although parents were the important stakeholders in the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, they were too busy earning income to secure their livelihood. They admitted that it was beyond their apolitical capability to bring funding and other support to the school. Meanwhile, the school needed an influential SMC Chair who could assist in increasing budgets for buildings and arranging educational facilities for students. Parents and teachers perceived Mr Neta as the right person for the position of SMC Chair.

Gaau ko School: Political Capturing of the SMC?

Mr Bike, the PTA Chair, was a dedicated parent in the *Gaau ko school* who had the zeal to improve the school's management and education system. He was a local and had even completed his schooling and college at the *Gaau ko school*. He admitted all his children to

school. Dairy farming, raising livestock, and agriculture are his occupations. He was PTA Chair at the young age of 30, and I found him enthusiastically working for the school and children's future. He was satisfied with the educational delivery of the *Gaau ko school*. He stated:

We have one private school in our village, but its management is very weak. The teachers are frequently changed in a short duration due to which our children cannot learn properly. This is not good for the future of our children. At this Gaau ko School, at least there are permanent teachers. If I need to discuss my son's math problems, I can meet the math teacher and consult with them. This school has begun teaching in the English medium.

(Mr Bike, PTA Chair, Gaau ko School)

Mr Bike frequently visited the school and interacted with the teachers because he had concerns about the school's management and education. I thought he was an appropriate person for the position of PTA Chair; however, after I met a senior teacher in the school, I realised the PTA Chair had no influence the school's decision-making. The teacher, Mr Pandit revealed:

PTA was provisioned in schools to network with parents and utilise their strengths for a school's development. The government had envisaged that PTA would keep an eye on the financial transaction of a school and alert the SMC about the ongoing activities. To our dismay, the PTA team consists of innocent parents. Mr Bike is a former student of this school. He has to give respect to his former teachers and the Head Sir. He cannot critically speak against the teachers, Head Sir, and SMC Chair, who are highly influential in the school management works. Moreover, it is the SMC that has authority to form the PTA.

(Mr Pandit, Teacher, Gaau ko School)

Previously, I thought down-to-earth people like Mr Bike would have strong influence in the governance of the *Gaau ko school*. My assumption turned out to be wrong. All the power of the *Gaau ko School* was centralised around the Head Sir, who represented the school administration and the SMC Chair, who led the school management. The SMC Chair was also the elected Ward Chair, and he had enrolled his children in the private school. Due to his power positioning as the Ward Chair, no one would dare to question why he had not enrolled his children in the *Gaau ko school*.

In this theme, I have presented findings related to the privileged class's engagement in public school management and the preference of the underprivileged class to choose public education. The following finding focuses on issues of gender inclusion in the school governance of the *Sahar ko school*.

5.4.2 Patriarchal Reflections in School Governance

On a day in December 2021, I was walking by the road of the *Sahar ko school* to drop my daughter off at her school. At the *Sahar ko school's* premises, I counted eight people sitting on benches and perhaps discussing school matters. The people were the Head Sir, an SMC member, a Member of Parliament of Bagmati Province, and others. All were men and they were busy discussing something serious. The situation revealed no content to me, but it raised one issue in my mind; why were there no women participants in the meeting? In the month of February, I talked to the stakeholders in the *Sahar ko school* regarding their roles and responsibilities in school governance. The SMC Chair, Mr Dhani shared:

I have been working as the SMC Chair in this school since 2001. In 2014, the government provisioned that birth parents could only become the SMC Chair. Then the school selected a new SMC Chair from the guardians, and he worked for some years. That guardian moved to a new place with his family as he was living in a rented accommodation. As the eldest committee member, I was again selected for the SMC Chair's post. Thus, I have been the SMC Chair in this school for 18 years in the last two decades.

(Mr Dhani, SMC Chair, *Sahar ko school*)

The male SMC Chair has been in the position for the last eighteen years. Since the 1980s, all the SMC Chairs have been men, whose names I could see pasted on the Head Sir's office. However, there was no answer to why the school had no female SMC Chairs over the last four decades.

During a conversation with Mr Dhani, he commented:

In our SMC, only three men members are active. They are me, Mr Kep and Mr Luv. Others are women parents who do not attend meetings. We must abide by the SMC norms to include parents and the females. Thus, we have kept their names on the committee as a formality. After every SMC meeting, Head Sir visits the houses of these women members and bring their signatures on the meeting minute. We have formed a separate committee for parents (PTA). Sometimes they organise meetings which we also attend.

(Mr Dhani, SMC Chair, *Sahar ko school*)

All the activities in the school were taken care of by the three men from the community, although the SMC had nominated some women to the committee to meet the government's criteria for female inclusion. A female participant confessed that the limited management experience of women was also a cause for their underrepresentation in the SMC. The PTA Chair of the *Sahar ko school* told me:

The school calls us to discuss issues such as upgrading classes, utilising any external aid, recruiting teachers, releasing teachers' salaries, and interacting with any visitors coming from the District Education Office. I have to attend such programs and speak some words. As I have not received a formal education, I find it difficult to share anything confidently. I speak little, and the SMC members speak about the significant school issues.

(Ms Didi, PTA Chair, *Sahar ko school*)

The SMC people were vocal retired men who could strongly put their views to the donors. The woman PTA Chair felt reluctant to present her views publicly in school gatherings. I talked to an elected representative about women representation in school governance. She expressed her views against the social malpractice of looking down upon females. She explained:

Gradually, the inclusion of females and even so-called low-caste females has initiated at community level. This is a positive change, which the new 2015 Constitution of Nepal has ensured. I know it is hard to eradicate patriarchal beliefs from our society, but it is not impossible. It takes time. Males still perceive that we know nothing, we speak without thinking, and we cannot take leadership in societal matters. There is a lot to bring changes in our society.

(Ms Chup, Elected representative, *Sahar ko school*)

This is a big statement by Ms Chup, “Males still perceive that we [females] know nothing”. She won the 2017 local Ward election under the Dalit-female quota. She was a well-educated and politically aware person in Lalitpur’s urban settlement. Her views represent the big picture of the patriarchal remnants in Nepali societies, which I witnessed in the school governance of the *Sahar ko school*. However, patriarchy is taken for granted by both men and women participants in this research. Besides patriarchy, I found that some locals misuse their local identity to control public school decision-making and resources, as detailed in the findings on local supremacy.

5.4.3 Local Supremacy in School Governance

The roles of locals are crucial to sound school governance, which is acknowledged in Nepal's educational acts, policies, and regulations. There are many good examples to show the influential role of local stakeholders in education development in Nepal (see Nepal National Planning Commission, 2015b, 2016; The World Bank, 2010b). My participants also revealed interesting narratives which showed their authority and roles in schools. However, every

beautiful story has a dark side. I now present findings related to local supremacy as counterproductive in school governance in the *Semi-Sahar ko* and *Gaau ko schools*.

The Semi-Sahar ko School: Handing a School Building to a Polytechnic Institute

In March 2021, the *Semi-Sahar ko school* was dismantling the older building to build a new one aided by a Japanese organisation. The school had issued a notice for vendors to buy the used bricks, windows, and iron rods from the dismantled building. It was an aha moment for the school as their dream to have a big building was coming true. To contrast this view, I listened to some grievances from parents about the ongoing construction and dismantling works on the school premises. The PTA Chair, whose three children were studying in the school, shared with me:

The construction work in the school has been going on for the last five years. The construction and dismantling activities have hampered the study of students. I even told teachers that we should not do these construction works in the mid of academic sessions. We had to build it immediately after the 2015 earthquake or during the school closure in the COVID pandemic period. I agree that this planning depends upon the donors and is beyond the control of the school. However, we should consider good teaching learning environment at first.

(Mr Bahun, PTA Chair, *Semi-Sahar ko school*)

Mr Bahun's dissatisfaction was evident as students felt disturbed due to the prolonged building works at the school. I listened to the same perception of a parent while I was in the Head Sir's office. I had visited to his office to collect some school documents, and as I was scanning the school magazines, a female parent arrived who belonged to the PTA. She came there to sign Social Audit documents. I greeted Namaskar to her, and the Head Sir permitted me to stay while they conversed. I listened to their interesting conversation which I present below.

Head Sir: Due to the COVID pandemic this year B.S 2077/2078³⁸, we could not conduct the PTA meeting. As you know, the PTA has to approve the Social Audit document of the school. Thus, I asked you to come to the school to see the document and put it in your signature.

This document contains: when the SMC meetings were held, what agendas were passed in the meetings, how many students are in our school, and the school's financial report. There are three copies, and one of these has to be sent to the Setidevi Municipality Office.

³⁸ 2021/22 A.D

The Head Sir flipped the document pages and showed where to put signatures. The parent signed all without reading. The Head Sir further continued the discussion with the parent.

Head Sir: How is your son's and daughter's education going? We have high expectations from your son to get good marks in the SEE exam.

Parent: They are doing very well, sir. I am pleased with your and the teachers' effort. However, I am facing one problem. My son departs for the school at 6:00 am and returns home at 11:00 am. Afterwards, he is free for the whole day and plays his mobile game. I bought him a mobile phone for his online classes when the school was closed due to COVID. The situation is normal now. As previously, can we not resume regular school hours from 9:00 am until 4:00 pm? I am worried as he is studying in the tenth grade, and he will appear for the SEE exam at the end of this year. He is a teenage boy, and his excessive mobile use also affects his health and studies.

Head Sir: I am really serious about this issue. Earlier, due to COVID, we had reduced the face-to-face classes' hours. Now (March 2021), our school has another issue. We lack study rooms as one of our older buildings is being dismantled. We are constructing a very big building. You know, this new building will be three storeys with 12 classrooms. Every room will be well furnished, and the floor will be carpeted. This school will be the top school in the Setidevi Municipality.

We lack enough land here, so it is the only option to dismantle the older building and make a new building. Due to the COVID effect also, we are running classes in two shifts. In the morning hours we teach the senior grades students and in the afternoon hours we teach the junior grades students. Now onwards, teachers plan to take tuition classes to the grade 10 students at 1:00 pm daily. The students will not have to stay at home during the daytime. I hope this new plan will solve your problem.

The parent remained silent after the clarification of the Head Sir. Due to the school reconstruction activities, the classes could not be conducted in a fully-fledged manner. However, the problems were not only COVID but also included fewer study rooms. The school had three buildings, and one was being dismantled. The school office was using the second one with few classrooms. The third building was lent to a polytechnic institute free of cost. The Setidevi Municipality office itself operated the polytechnic institute. I asked a local teacher: "The school has provided one building to the polytechnic institute. What is your view regarding this?" He replied:

The Setidevi municipality hurriedly opened this polytechnic institute without its building. In this institute, students can complete a technical diploma education. The institute temporarily uses one of the school's buildings and will shift to a prominent place after its setup. Upon the Municipality's request, we have not charged any cost to them. Education in this polytechnic is comparatively one-third cheaper than private institutes; thus, poor students can benefit from this.

(Mr Dada, A teacher, Semi- Sahar ko school)

The lending of the building to the Setidevi Municipality office by the *Semi-Sahar ko school* was favoured by the municipality office but not the school. When the school needed its building, the administration could not ask the Municipality Office it to return them. Instead, the school was trying to convince parents that due to COVID they were compelled to conduct classes in the two shifts. A parent added a different view to the discussion about the new school buildings. He shared:

Making a new building will not only solve all the education problems in the school. Students' numbers should also increase. We have to add facilities for our children. We indeed have insufficient land on this school premises. I even proposed shifting this school to the school's larger property, which is the nearby Community Forest area. I discussed this issue with the Head Sir, but no one listened to me.

(Mr Mate, A parent, Semi- Sahar ko school)

The opening of the polytechnic institute was, of course, praiseworthy and a political decision of the Setidevi Municipality. However, the Municipality Office did not calculate the learning loss of the students in the *Semi-Sahar ko school* due to fewer study rooms for them. It seemed to be the top-down attitude of the local government's authorities towards the school. Due to the power roles of the municipality office, nobody could critically question the school administration and the SMC about the occupancy of their school building by the polytechnic institute.

The Gaau ko school: Groupism of Local Teachers

As presented earlier, the *Gaau ko school* is situated in a rural settlement in Lalitpur. Most of the teachers and all the students were locals. After the formation of the local government in 2017, the Kalidevi Rural Municipality office performed two major educational reforms. Firstly, it prepared and implemented the 2019 Local Education Act. Secondly, it

appointed capable Head Teachers in all 28 public schools. Previously, the public schools had Head Teachers who had lower qualifications. Less qualified teachers used their political power and local identity to be the Head Teachers. As a reform, the Rural Municipality conducted new exams amongst its teachers and appointed capable Head Teachers.

The *Gaau ko school* has also got a new Head Sir, Mr Purba, who was neither a local—he was from the Eastern region of Nepal—nor affiliated with any local political party. Due to his origin, he faced a lot of kick-back from the former Head Sir, some teachers, and some parents.

He told me:

I have been working here as a teacher for the last three years. After being selected as the Head Sir, I was not warmly welcomed by the former Head Sir. Some other local teachers also resisted my appointment. I passed the exam conducted by the Kalidevi Rural Municipality office. As this is a public school, every qualified Nepali citizen has the right to work. The SMC did not cooperate with me. This discrimination happened because I was an outsider.

There is a group amongst the former Head Teacher and local teachers against me. The SMC people are dominantly the dissatisfied locals who are against my recruitment. However, I am trying to cordially handle the situation by acknowledging their importance in this school. Nearby our school, there is a private school of which most of the SMC people of our school are the shareholders. Thus, I have to deal with the vested interests of these SMC members.

(Mr Purba, Head Sir, Gaau ko school)

Purba's narratives open two discussions. First, the local teachers and the former Head Sir of the school did not want to have a Head Sir who came from a different place. Secondly, the SMC people in the school had a conflict of interest with the former Head Sir who was local. So, they could not accept the decision of the Rural Municipality office to recruit the new Head Sir in the *Gaau ko school*. Mr Purba further elaborated:

I realise that teaching learning in our school has become ineffective these days. Many of the teachers are locals and actively engage in party politics. They say that outer people should not be a public school's Head Sir in their place. Even some educated parents think like this. Some locals here even blame that the outsiders who have hands-to-mouth problems back home come to work in their school. These locals have a conservative mindset.

The former Head Sir was very inefficient. For three years, I never found him acting against the teachers who could not perform their duty sincerely. Even some local teachers would gather on the ground during school hours and gossip about their buffaloes and milk production. Nobody would dare to ask these teachers to go back to their classes. In the morning, they would do the

milking, clean the sheds, and cook home meals. Afterwards, they would become tired and come to take a rest at school.

(Mr Purba, Head Sir, Gaau ko school)

Mr Purba's grievances were related to the supremacy of locals. However, the former Head Sir, Mr Doko, had different ideas regarding the appointment of the new Head Sir, Mr Purba. Mr Doko perceived that he had become the victim of political biases and was compelled to resign from the post. He shared:

Due to political motives, the Kalidevi Rural Municipality Office has administratively removed the other Head Sirs and me. The Rural Municipality is trying to evade us from leadership positions in schools. As a result, the learning environment in the school has completely deteriorated. There is a conflict between the newly recruited Head Sir and us.

(Mr Doko, Former Head Sir, Gaau ko school)

Mr Doko's narratives signal a critical exercise of politics in rural schools. The Kalidevi Rural Municipality has a Chair and Vice-Chair who both belong to the Communist Party of Nepal-UML. In contrast, Mr Doko represented a teacher's union of the Nepali Congress Party. The Communist Party of Nepal-UML party is pro to communism, and the Nepali Congress Party is pro-capitalism, so there is an ideological difference and power tussle between the Municipality's Chair and Mr Doko. Consequently, Mr Doko claimed political biases influenced the Head Teacher's selection process.

I had another conversation at the *Gaau ko school* to supplement the discussion on the supremacy of locals in public schools. As presented earlier, a volleyball competition was organised at the school's playground in April 2021. I met Mr Tamang, who was the event manager of the competition and a former student of the *Gaau ko school*. We talked about the competition for a while and became friends in no time. He informed me about the event, prizes, teams, and who was the event's chief guest to distribute the prizes. While we were having the conversation, we saw the Head Sir of the *Gaau ko school* carrying a coil of electric wire to help the event organiser. I linked the scene of the Head Sir in my discussion with Mr Tamang. The conversation happened as below:

Me: (Looking at the Head Sir) I guess the school has cooperated well to organise the sports event. Look! The Head Sir is bringing the electric wire.

Mr Tamang: If there were local teachers, they would be only active at home. The current Head Sir is from outside the locality. He seems wholly dedicated to the school's work.

Tamang's view made me anxious to unpack his positive views towards an outsider Head Sir. I asked him:

Me: Why do you have such perceptions?

Mr Tamang: In order to have a good education in public schools, the teachers should not be the locals. The local teachers have tamed domestic animals such as cows, goats, and buffaloes in their houses. They remained busy with these animals and their farm work. While I was a student in this *Gaau ko school*, our Head Sir's house was next to the school. I would often see him coming to the school's assembly with the same dirty hand that he used to prepare *kudo*³⁹ for his animals. Every teacher and student would dominate him because of his personality. A Head Sir must be strict and professional so that everyone in the school will be disciplined.

Mr Tamang's narratives helped me to visualise an image of his former Head Sir, who was a local but unable to separate his professional and personal life. Parents wished to have a disciplined school environment with a capable Head Sir whom everyone would respect.

While talking with some other participants in the *Gaau ko school*, I found that the Head Sir, Mr Purba, was engaged in every school activity from teaching-learning, management, construction to administration. This heavy engagement of the Head Sir in different school activities increased his workload. At the same time, this increasing influence of the Head Sir might have forced locals to suppress his roles. Regarding the roles of the Head Teachers in school governance, the Education Officer of the Kalidevi Rural Municipality forwarded his critical view "A Head Teacher should behave like a scholar and have an academic personality. They should not be authorised responsibility to look after the school construction works." He shared:

A SMC or the school's administration should be separated from construction-related work. Schools should be developed purely as academic institutions. Currently, the DLPIU⁴⁰ gives money to schools directly, and the schools find contractors to build the building. Why can't the DLPIU search the contractors themselves?

³⁹ Homemade livestock feed

⁴⁰ The full form of the DLPIU is District Level Program Implementation Unit. It is a government project under the Nepal Reconstruction Authority (NRA) to build school buildings damaged due to the 2015 earthquake. NRA was closed by the government in 2021, and the schools reconstruction authority is handed to the Central Ministry of Education.

SMCs in public schools do not have their engineer to ensure the quality of such big constructions. Head Sirs are unaware of the Public Procurement Acts to purchase construction materials. Unfortunately, SMCs and Head Sirs are engaged in these construction activities. Education Offices are also not provided such authority.

(Mr Paschim, Education Officer, Gaau ko school)

Mr Paschim clarified that schools must be separated from all purchases and construction works. The community could not ensure the quality of any construction work, but they should be aware of the ongoing developments in their school. I found that SMCs and Head Sirs wanted their involvement in every aspect of school operations, meaning they were unable to focus on quality education. In another discussion, the SMC Chair of the *Gaau ko school* expressed views similar to Mr Paschim's. The Chair shared:

I agree that the workload of a Head Sir has increased due to added responsibility of the school's management. Teaching and management works are two different aspects. I believe there has to be a separate post for a school manager, at least in a secondary school. A responsible person from a school must be on standby to look after the school's management.

(Mr Boss, SMC Chair, *Gaau ko School*)

A different position of a school manager would be a better solution to deal with the school administration, SMC, and construction works. In my experience, a significant responsibility of public-school Head Teachers is to support and monitor other teachers. Boss's suggestions were intriguing as they involved reforming the current school governance practice in which a Head Teacher has engagements in every role. In another conversation with Mr Paschim, he expressed his dissatisfaction with his local government's budget planning process. Mr Paschim viewed:

While planning the budget for schools, the Education Office is never consulted. The elected representatives may be frightened that Education Office will curb the ill practices of budget allocation. These people are not serious about improving public education. These people are the investors in private schools, and the progress of public education means shutting down their businesses.

(Mr Paschim, Education Officer, Gaau ko school)

Principally, an Education Officer is an expert and the person responsible for educational development in a local government unit. Despite this, the elected representatives in the Kalidevi Rural Municipality did not consult with Mr Paschim when making budgetary plans for

schools. This scenario indicated the supremacy of locals and the poor attitude of the local political actors towards developing education.

5.5 Chapter Summary

Interviews with my research participants and my observation of their engagement in schools helped me reveal the cultural and social values that motivated them to become involved in school governance. Firstly, community engagement is motivated by the teachings of past generations who were keen to establish and promote educational institutions in their localities. In the present educational context, philanthropic activities of locals, elected representatives, and local politicians help in local resource generation and sound management of a school. Secondly, there is engagement of multiple stakeholders, such as parents, community, teachers, elected representatives, and donors to collaborate for a school's development. This engagement is influenced by the value of belongingness amongst people in Nepali society. Thirdly, Hinduism is a belief system that culturally binds a school and its community and creates positive learning environments. Fourthly, there are some orthodox mindsets of locals, such as social-class segregation, patriarchy, and local supremacy in performing school governance roles. These different perceptions of my participants about public school governance are reflections of their social and cultural values. Their views are mostly centred on the theories of localism and Eastern Philosophy, which I discuss in Chapter Seven. In Chapter Six, I present findings related to the influences of politics on school governance. I found that power exercise in schools created an environment that encouraged people to work in the SMCs and contribute to better school management and governance.

Chapter Six

Political Influences of Lalitpur's Locals in School Governance

In my participants' narratives, I found several activities outside the community's control, such as education policy making, funding school infrastructure, and government legislation. I uncovered that political exercise amongst school stakeholders is a key to bringing support to schools in the areas that lack community access and specialities. In this chapter, I present the findings about the influences of power relations in school governance, using participants' stories. These findings about politics are related to the second research question, which is to explore how political influences shape group and community involvement or otherwise in school governance in Lalitpur, Nepal.

I have determined that political power has both positive and negative impacts in school governance. The community considers that schools represent the government at the local level, so the school managers' positions are prestigious and powerful, local political influence is a motivation for school stakeholders to work in the SMCs. The effects of local governance in promoting schools through local governments, preparation of local education acts and local curricula, and leadership during the COVID pandemic are explained in this chapter. I have found that party politics has negatively affected school governance structures, such as local governments, SMCs, and teachers' unions, and has made schools dependent on donors for funding.

I have organised this chapter into two thematic headings: positive influences of politics, and politics as a negative force. I now move onto the findings on positive influences of politics related to bring managerial reforms of schools and supporting the educational decentralisation process.

6.1 Positive Influences of Politics on School Governance

Multiple local stakeholders—parents, teachers, Head Teachers, elected representative, and social workers, among others—engage in school governance in Nepal. Politics is an exercise of power to influence decision-making in an institution (Osieja, 2021), and it exists everywhere where there are human interactions and debates (Modebadze, 2010). I view that politics in

schools involves broader power relations that exist between the stakeholders to influence and implement different school decisions aimed at improving the school. I thematise the participants' narratives on the positive aspects of politics in school governance as schools *as power centres* and *local governance*.

6.1.1 Schools as Power Centres: Bringing Locals to Schools

Public schools are government entities in Nepal whose lands and assets belong to the government. The government recruits teachers, manages their salaries, and supports a school's daily administration costs (Government of Nepal, 2018). SMCs help in school management and local resource mobilisation. The post of SMC Chair seems a lucrative position for those who hold political positions and who aspire to be political leaders. This is attractive because social networks and prestige can be developed by interacting with parents, locals, and teachers. I present the findings related to the schools as power centres in attracting groups and communities in the *Sahar ko* and *Semi-Sahar ko* schools.

The Sahar ko School: Engagement of Affluent Persons in the SMC

After the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, the *Sahar ko school* received financial grants from the Government to build three earthquake-resistant buildings. During my fieldwork in February 2021, I could see workers had been mobilised to finish the work of the third building, and the school-building work continued during Nepal's second wave⁴¹ of COVID pandemic lockdown. The SMC had assigned a local contractor to undertake the work which was supervised by the engineers of the construction project. By December 2021, the construction works of all buildings had been completed and students were shifted to the new buildings. The school was upgraded to teach to grade 11 from the previous grade 10, which I understood by reading the advertisement banner regarding admission.

⁴¹ April to August 2021

Admission open! Admission open! Admission open!
2021/22 (2078 B.S)

The *Sahar ko school* opens admission in Grade 11 for the academic year 2078. Our salient features are:

- Teaching-learning in a peaceful and entertaining environment
- Teaching-learning in English and Nepali mediums
- Facilities of the library, computers, and internet
- Students can choose their subjects
- Qualified and experienced teachers
- Extra-curricular activities as a part of teaching-learning
- Teaching in a friendly environment
- Prioritising the needs of students

An admission banner for Grade Eleven was the most historic achievement for the school since its establishment in 1980; the three new school buildings and the admission banner for Grade Eleven symbolically indicated the excellent outcomes at the *Sahar ko school*.

The completion of the third school building during the second wave of the COVID pandemic was an excellent achievement by the SMC. The second wave was more devastating in Nepal, claiming thousands of lives with the death toll rate peaking at 246 per day (Amnesty International, 2021; Pandey et al., 2022). The ordinary lives of people were severely curtailed, most government offices were shut down, and people had stopped moving around. In this regard, Mr Dhani shared about the building construction:

As we all (SMC members, contractors, and workers) live close to the school, the school construction work was not stopped during the COVID. Before COVID began to spread, we purchased all construction materials and stored them on the school's premises. Workers maintained social distancing at the workplace, and we asked them to wear face masks and wash their hands regularly. A closed team of workers were mobilised, and no unauthorised person was allowed to go to the construction site. SMC members supervised the work from a distance. In this way, the work was completed in the planned time.

(Mr Dhani, SMC Chair, Sahar ko school)

The SMC did not construct the school building themselves; instead, they hired a contractor and monitored the construction works. The Government funded the school building work, and project engineers from the related government offices came to do the technical monitoring of the work. Mr Dhani added:

Previously, I used to go to school regularly. These days, I monitor the school building works from my house. The Government provides funding for the construction work on the joint bank

account of the Head Sir and Deputy Head Teacher. I facilitate the work by purchasing the construction materials. If any material is finished at the construction site, I order them from the nearby contractors and recommend the school administration for payment. Our SMC manages contractors, labourers, and construction materials such as brick, pebbles, iron rods, cement, and sand. If we order bricks by making the advance payment, it only costs 11 Nepali Rupees per piece. Otherwise, it would cost 15 per piece. I suggest the school purchases in advance, which is profitable.

(Mr Dhani, SMC Chair, Sahar ko school)

The interaction with Mr Dhani revealed a few things. First, the school has an SMC Chair who is expert on construction related management, school management, building construction, and accounting. He is a resident of the settlement where the school is situated and is undertaking unpaid work as an SMC Chair. He has been the Chair of the school for the last two decades, and parents and locals are happy with his benevolent contributions to the school [refer to Chapter Five: Narrative Findings p. 90]. His position and work in the school have added to his social status in the settlement, which makes him pleased to work for the school. The other members are retired army and police officers who have the zeal to contribute to society's development by helping a public school. Second, the division of work among stakeholders benefitted the school and led to the completion of the building. Besides the construction role, the SMC team is also concerned with quality education. Mr Dhani further revealed:

I would regularly visit the school and interact with students. It is not possible due to the COVID-pandemic now [February 2021]. I used to question students about the teachings of teachers and their learning. I faced objections from some of the teachers regarding my inspection. Neither I listened to them nor interacted with them. I consulted about the school's issues only with the Head Sir.

(Mr Dhani, SMC Chair, Sahar ko school)

Mr Dhani used to monitor the educational delivery at the *Sahar ko school*, but this stopped due to the COVID pandemic. Mr Dhani was in poor health, so he was unable to visit the school, so the Deputy Head Teacher acknowledged that the SMC members were engaged in monitoring and supporting activities in the school; however, this decreased during the pandemic. She shared with me another strategy of the SMC to help the school.

These days, the SMC has hired Mr Sun to oversee the construction work in our school. He interacts with workers, takes notes of the construction materials, and informs the SMC Chair of the progress made. The school pays him 300 Nepali Rupees daily to supervise and support

logistics during the construction work. Everyone is happy with Mr Sun's work as he is skilful and sincere. By the way, Mr Sun is also the driver of our SMC Chair. The Chair personally gives him a monthly salary.

(Ms Nitu, Deputy Head Teacher, Sahar ko school)

The monitoring of SMC and field supervision of Mr Sun yielded favourable outcomes in the school's construction work. The SMC also built seven rooms on the land adjoining the road. The rooms were hired by local vendors and the school collected the rent. The tenants' names were posted on a wall in the Deputy Head Teacher's room. I asked the Deputy Head Teacher about the rooms, and she commented:

The school makes income from the rooms' rent. The earnings are used to pay the salary of privately funded teachers.

(Ms Nitu, Deputy Head Teacher, Sahar ko school)

The motive of the SMC was to make the school economically sustainable, so the school used the money for educational purposes. In relation to this, I talked with the Education Officer of Patan Metropolitan City, and she held the view that a public school had the autonomy to explore or self-create financial resources. She told me:

Some schools earn money by renting unused rooms to local vendors. A school can use its earnings to recruit teachers, manage science and computer labs, pay internet, electricity, and drinking water bills, and support needy students. The schools should be transparent with the income and expenditure of these earnings.

(Ms Paleti, Education Officer, Sahar ko school)

Ms Paleti stressed transparency regarding the use of resources, which is an essential component of good governance. The engagement of capable and efficient locals in the SMC has helped to promote educational quality, monitor construction works, and explore and generate financial resources.

The Semi-Sahar ko school: Political Grooming of Leaders

As I discussed in Chapter Five, the *Semi-Sahar ko school* received a grant of 70 million Nepali Rupees from a Japanese organisation to construct a new building. I found the SMC Chair, Mr Neta, highly engaged in meetings with the donors regarding the construction work. The first day I met him was a Saturday, which is a public weekend holiday in Nepal, so all schools remain

closed. After receiving his consent for an interview, I reached his house at noon, but he was busy in a meeting with some people. I waited for him in front of his big grocery mart on the ground floor of his house. After the meeting was over, Mr Neta phoned the Head Sir, Mr Dhyan, and shared with him the purpose and decisions of the meeting. Mr Neta explained me:

Our school is constructing a new school building with the support of donors. This morning the representatives of the donor, contractor, and site engineer of the building project came to my house. We discussed and shared our plans to facilitate the construction process. As today is the day off for teachers and staff, I arranged the meeting at my house. I want to proceed with the construction work very quickly.

(Mr Neta, SMC Chair, Semi- Sahar ko school)

Mr Neta had multiple identities and roles in the school, and he seemed like a dedicated SMC Chair of the *Semi-Sahar ko school*. He had a good sense of political networking and a well-reputed social status in the Setidevi Municipality, and his leadership role in bringing a building project to the school was applauded by the Head Sir of the school. The Head Sir commented:

Behind the scenes [to receive the 70 million Nepali Rupees], the SMC has developed several connections and approaches with dozens of influential people. The link and influence of the SMC Chair matters highly to convince donors. All our teams are actively engaged in finding channels to advance the budget of the school.

(Mr Dhyan, Head Teacher, Semi- Sahar ko school)

Mr Dhyan's comments show the influence of an SMC in gaining funding for a public school. The Setidevi Municipality Office forms the SMCs in the municipality public schools, as guided by the 2019 Local Education Act. There is a three-member search committee, which includes the Ward Chair, the Education Officer from the Municipality Office, and the Head Sir, to select the SMC Chair. This search committee identifies and recommends a list of three potential candidates to the Municipality Office through which the Municipal Assembly nominates the SMC Chair. After the SMC Chair assumes office, he or she nominates other members in collaboration with the Head Sir. The tenure of the SMC is three years. Some of the nominated SMC members are non-parents.

There are political relationships between the Head Sir, Mr Dhyan, and the SMC Chair, Mr Neta, in the *Semi-Sahar ko school*. In my discussion with Mr Dhyan, I learned he is the Municipal President of the teacher union affiliated with the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN)-

Maoist. Mr Neta is the local leader of the same party and was a candidate for Ward Chair in the 2017 local elections but was defeated. Afterwards, he engaged actively in social works, such as managing the public schools, sanitation, blood donations, financial cooperatives, and organising sports competitions. Some SMC members and parents viewed Neta's political background, local identity, and networking as beneficial for the school's finances. The donors also trusted him as a reliable person due to his positionality in society and the school. The school benefitted from his leadership roles. Mr Neta stated:

There is high importance of having an impactful SMC in a school. In many cases, I have seen the teaching staff do not obey the orders of the Head Sir. It is easy for me to manage the teachers as I am an outsider, a political person, and a socially known one. I have contact with many people; thus, I can also bring school resources.

I have a direct relationship with the Mayor of the Setidevi Municipality through political relation. The Head Sir is a staff member of the Municipality, and the Mayor may not listen to the Head Sir's school development plans. The District Level Program Implementation Unit also sees the Head Sir as a staff with a low hierarchy. These government offices listen to my requests and decisions.

(Neta, SMC Chair, Semi-Sahar ko school)

Mr Neta's statements showed his power relationships with the school and other government agencies. Despite allegations from some locals that his political identity was harmful to the school's educational functions, Mr Neta was dedicated to working for the school. The PTA Chair was quite satisfied with the performance of the SMC Chair. He expressed:

Politically, the SMC Chair holds a powerful position in this municipality as he belongs to the current ruling party in Nepal. It could be a reason behind his nomination as the Chair, as there were many aspirants for this post. The Municipality sent him as he is a capable and politically powerful person in this locality.

Until now, his presence has not made the school environment political. Instead, he has used his networks to bring funds to the school. The school received a budget from the DLPIU to construct our first building. Guardians do not come to the school and show any seriousness in their children's education. The SMC Chair has done a lot for this school.

(Mr Bahun, PTA Chair, Semi- Sahar ko school)

The PTA Chair highly endorsed Mr Neta's roles. I found that other participants also took care of and responsibility for the school's functioning; there was interesting conversation with a parent

of the school Mr Mate. He shared with me how he contributed to the school during the COVID pandemic. He explained:

I help our school in many ways. Just before the COVID-pandemic, an NGO had donated money to make a water tank and install a water purification plant. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-pandemic lockdown, teachers could not come to the school. The Head Sir also lives far from this settlement. He and the SMC Chair requested me to supervise the work in the school.

As a local, I could come here at any time. I took all responsibility for the water tank construction. I mobilised the contractors and labourers, and the work was fast completed in a month. I also assisted with the building painting works, planted the flowers and *Dhuppis*⁴² in the garden, and did watering every day. No one came to school for three months. I was also free, and I took good care of the school.

(Mr Mate, A parent and SMC member, Semi- Sahar ko school)

Mr Mate is locally involved with the school. He was nominated as a parent representative in the SMC by Mr Neta. Mr Mate commented:

Without vocal people in a school, it is challenging to bring resources. Our SMC Chair is very active and visits everywhere to seek funds. He was a candidate in the last Ward election representing the CPN- Maoist party. As I belong to the same party, I helped him to get more public votes in my settlement. However, the result turned against him. Accessible persons like him can help in the school's development. Parents need more networks to bring big grants.

(Mr Mate, SMC member, Semi- Sahar ko school)

Mr Mate's thoughts indicate that an SMC with only parents is not influential. This is because parents cannot contribute money and time and do not have the power to bring funding for a school. Instead, a school can benefit from non-parents who are vocal and politically influential. The views of the SMC and PTA members in the *Semi Sahar ko school* justify the necessity of having people with political identities in a school. I further asked Mr Mate about the source of his livelihood to discover if he had any conflicts of interest in his apparently selfless help for the school. He revealed:

I am a bus driver. I am not engaged in this school for earning. If the school requires it, I help my own money to support it because this is our school. We must help public schools. I never think about earning by doing such volunteer work.

(Mr Mate, A parent, Semi- Sahar ko school)

⁴² Black Juniper: A kind of decoration plant in Nepal

“Because this is our school”- this thoughtful statement by Mr Mate helped me understand the reasons for his ownership and unconditional help to the school. In another discussion with the Head Teacher at the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, he revealed that the school must be proactive to engage the community. He explained:

Community is neither active nor passive. It depends on how the school mobilises and gets optimum benefit from collective strength of locals. We request the community people to attend school activities, and they come to join. I feel the school-community relationship is extraordinary, and the school has to take the initiative for the gatherings. These regular communications will strengthen this connection. Instead, if school leadership is uninterested in this relation, the community will not come.

When I meet any community people outside the school, I request them to attend the school's meeting. Many come to school, but if some hesitate, we regularly follow up to ensure their participation. The community people wait for the school to invite them. They are searching for a space to come to school and help us. They will consider that the school acknowledges them, if we talk to them. If we listen to them and value their views, there are many potentialities to get their support for our school's development.

(Mr Dhyana, Head Sir, Semi- Sahar ko school)

A community's mobilisation is essential in any development process, including educational reform, and dutiful school leadership can be important in bringing outside support to a school. These participants' narratives indicate that locals devotedly work for the welfare and development of the *Semi-Sahar ko school*. The attraction of power brings political leaders to work for school's betterment, and the locals and parents appreciate their contributions.

Gaau ko School: Elected Representatives in the SMC

The leadership of public schools by elected representatives is a topic for heated debate in Nepal. As I stated in Chapter Five, the Kalidevi Rural Municipality assigned the elected Ward Chair as the SMC Chair of the *Gaau ko School*. The teachers, Head Teachers, and some residents appraised that the roles of the elected representatives in the school made the school's management political. However, the Chair considered that this provisioning by the Municipality was the appropriate model for the management of public schools. He shared:

The model in which an elected Ward representative leads the SMCs will encompass all school stakeholders. It helps to improve school education in an integrated manner. If there is the engagement of only one stakeholder, it looks like a chair standing with one leg. For instance, if

there are only guardians in the SMCs, they can look after education. But they might miss the development of other sectors such as buildings, funding management, and coordination with donors.

The SMC Chair further added:

In a school, the roles of outside people are very crucial. We can have educationists whose advice can bring substantive changes. Such as you (pointing towards me) are doing a PhD and gaining expertise in the school leadership field. After you retire from your professional work, may be at 50-60 years of age, you will have lots of experience and knowledge. If you are not a guardian of public schools, you will have no role in contributing these schools. The expert people will be restricted from helping the schools. Therefore, educational policies should encompass every important stakeholder in the school's development.

(Mr Boss, SMC Chair, Gaau ko School)

A legal framework that entails political leadership, educators, and parents can help in the integrated development of a school. The SMC Chair's views indicated that education development was only possible through all stakeholders' joint efforts and collaboration.

Supporting the claim of the SMC Chair, a retired teacher at the school, Mr Purano, expressed that:

The Ward president is now the SMC president in our school. They are political persons; thus, they might politically influence the school. At the same time, it depends upon the person's vision and will to develop the school. The primary thing which should not be compromised is quality education. The political person should use politics as means of school development, but not as an end to gain power. Any person who considers this factor seriously can lead the SMCs. A political person can bring resources to the school. If an apolitical person leads the SMC, they again have to rely upon the political persons to get funding.

(Mr Purano, A retired teacher, Gaau ko school)

The narratives of Mr Boss and Mr Purano signal that the political engagements of elected representatives help promote local ownership and engagement in school governance activities. The representatives can reform school management systems and bring funding for infrastructure development.

Apart from the influence of schools as power centres to bring local stakeholders together, politics has supported the local governance of school education in Nepal. In the following findings, participants' experiences about the progressive performance of local governments in school education are given, such as the preparing local education acts and local

schooling curricula, taking leadership during the COVID pandemic, and assisting the central government in nationwide teacher management programs.

6.1.2 Local Governance in School Education: A Catalyst?

Local governance in schooling education is a new practice in Nepal initiated with the promulgation of the 2015 Constitution. There are 753 local governments in the country to initiate development works and provide administrative services locally. In this regard, my participants believed that the local governments were really helpful in managing reforms of schools. I now present the different impacts of local governance on my researched schools.

The Sahar ko school: Local Governments in the SMC and Handling the COVID-pandemic

Patan Metropolitan City governs the *Sahar ko school* through the 2020 Local Education Act. There are 29 Wards in the City, and the Education Act delegates the elected Ward Committees to manage the public schools. I talked with a Ward Committee member who agreed that public education was now the concern of the local governments. She revealed:

SMCs are an essential element of schools, but local governments should now be accountable for school education. These governments should regularly monitor public schools by making plans. Every Palika (local Government) has its education department. This department should see: How is the Head Sir managing the school? How are the teachers applying their lesson plans? How do the students feel about the education of their school? These inquiries will strengthen the education system and help the future of children.

(Ms Chup, Elected Representative, Sahar ko school)

Ms Chup desired a strong and responsible Ward Committee to improve public education. As an elected representative, she felt responsible for engaging with every social issue, including school reforms. In relation to the engagement of local governments in schools, Ms Chup added:

Local developments have to be performed by a Ward office, including school education. Law has delegated this authority to local governments. Elected political persons represent the Ward office. Politics is essential to envision and execute development plans in society which of course contain certain ideology and the leadership. Even the Prime Minister of a country belongs to a party, political leaderships in a public institution is not a problem. In schools, the existing education policies should be prioritised while making school plans. Meanwhile I cannot deny that political dominance has become the current problem in school education.

(Ms Chup, Elected representative, Sahar ko school)

Accordingly, Ms Chup explained that Nepali people needed to use politics correctly in promoting school education. She viewed that politics is not simply carrying out a party's ideology, but politics add-on to the vision of education development through local leaderships. The Education Officer in Patan Metropolitan City agreed that the schools need capable leaders for their overall growth. She shared:

Until now [2021], the 1971 Education Act has been amended at least ten times to incorporate changes in the areas of school governance, student learning and assessment, and teachers' professional security. Schools had SMC Chairs who were selected from parents in the earlier Education Act [Seventh Amendment in 2001]. It is a bitter reality that in public schools, the children who do not have access to private schools due to poverty are enrolled. Poor parents cannot give their time and expertise to public schools. Due to these social reasons, the Education Act was completed as the Eighth Amendment in 2016 to nominate anyone capable person in the SMC team as its Chair.

(Ms Paleti, Education Officer, Patan Metropolitan City Office)

The elected SMC representatives and the Education Officer perceive that the engagement of political representatives in SMCs will bring positive changes to public schools. The elected representatives will responsibly work for schools as they have received the mandate of people from the elections.

Local governments were crucial in managing school education during the COVID pandemic in Nepal, where the first wave of the pandemic lasted from March to September 2020 during which time educational institutions were closed. In the *Sahar ko school*, Mr Naya joined as the Head Sir in August 2020 when the COVID situation was getting worse across the country with an increasing death toll. There was no certainty of reopening the schools in Lalitpur. The Nepali Government issued directives to shut the schools and opted for alternative teaching methods. The *Sahar ko school* consulted with its local government (Patan Metropolitan City office) and began online teaching. However, the online classes remained functional for adult students only as many students had poor access to the internet and smartphones. The Deputy Head Teacher at the school remembered:

It was quite a challenging experience to include small children in online classes. Around 90% of students from Grades 9 and 10 and 75% from Grades 5 to 8 were presented in online classes.

(Ms Nitu, Deputy Head Teacher, Sahar ko school)

Ms Nitu's thoughts indicate that the learning loss of students was one of the negative impacts of COVID on Nepal's schooling education. The havoc caused by the first wave of the COVID pandemic gradually eased in September 2020. Afterwards, there was pressure from school stakeholders to resume physical classes; however, Mr Naya alone could not accept the risk of reopening the school. Meanwhile, in November 2020, the Central Government issued the COVID-Related School Opening Guidelines, which meant schools could reopen with permission from local governments. Mr Naya consulted with the Patan Metropolitan Office, which suggested arranging a meeting amongst school stakeholders and seeking a local decision on school reopening. Then the school called a mass meeting of teachers, the Head Teacher, SMC, PTA, Child club, local journalists, elected representatives, politicians, and parents. Mr Naya tried to convince all stakeholders to open the school as per the Central Government's guidelines. He shared:

The COVID-pandemic interrupted our regular teachings in the school. The teachers continued the online classes for some months; however, it was only beneficial for adult students. Later, the Central Government issued guidelines to conduct the face-to-face classes in November 2020. Our school called a mass meeting of all stakeholders to share our plan for resuming the classes. We sought their advice, and most parents willingly gave consent to open the school. We informed our decision in the Patan Metropolitan City office and started physical classes. (Mr Naya, Head Sir, Sahar ko school)

During the COVID-pandemic, the Patan Metropolitan City office assumed leadership in order to sustain school education. The city office, which was in regular contact with the Central Government and the schools, had responsibilities to take care of students' well-being and minimise their learning losses due to the prolonged closure of the schools. The guardianship role of the local Government was helpful for the *Sahar ko school* in continuing online classes during the pandemic and resuming physical classes after the pandemic's effects diminished.

In addition, the Patan Metropolitan City office also prepared local schooling curricula. Lalitpur is known for preserving ancient culture, the living Goddess 'Kumari', and traditional arts and crafts (Ghimire, 2018). In this regard, the Education Officer of the Patan Metropolitan City office informed me about the importance and diverse nature of the local curriculum. She shared:

Recently, our municipality office drafted local curriculums up to Grade three. Schools can choose any local language as the medium of instruction to teach these curriculums. We have incorporated the Patan's culture, tradition, and heritage into these curriculums. These aim to promote, develop, and diffuse local skills to the new generations and help them to sustain their lives. Such as, if children learn about Patan's Krishna Temple, they can earn money by guiding tourists.

(Ms Paleti, Education Officer, Sahar ko school)

Ms Paleti believed that the local curriculum transfers traditions and skills to the newer generation through a formal education system. Despite these encouraging views on the local curriculum, there are some lapses in its implementation. The *Sahar ko school* accommodated students from 35 out of 77 districts in Nepal. Mr Naya shared his views on the relevance of local curriculum in urban public schools with few local students. He reflected:

The local curriculum has been introduced from a concept - 'think globally, act locally'. I have some objections to implementing the local curriculum in urban public schools. While teaching local curriculum, it needs to be clarified whether the students should be locals or not. Most of the students in the city schools are migrants. The local curriculum is applicable where the schools have most local students.

(Mr Naya, Head Sir, Sahar ko school)

Ms Paleti partially answered the concerns of the Head Sir regarding the implication of local curricula in urban schools. She shared:

Along with the public schools, private schools should also teach the local curriculum. The private schools will benefit because they have more local students than public schools.

(Ms Paleti, Education Officer, Sahar ko school)

I found logic in Mr Naya's narrative because there are no local students in the *Sahar ko school*, and the implications of teaching local issues to migrant students were unclear. At the same time, the local government has responsibility for preserving and promoting the cultural identity of its local residents through the education system.

The Semi-Sahar ko school: Teachers' Management and Local Curriculum

At the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, I found the Head Teacher, Mr Dhyani, to be pleased with the Setidevi Municipality prioritising school education. The Municipality prepared and endorsed the Local Education Act to supervise, monitor, and develop public education. The Municipality also organised training for teachers in using information technology to conduct online classes

and personal development training, such as leadership. It developed the local schooling curriculum with textbooks from grades 1 to 5, as per the guidelines of the Nepal National Curriculum Framework 2017. “Overall, our local government is performing as the role of a catalyst in developing school education,” Mr Dhyana said.

I realised that the Setidevi Municipality was efficiently developing public education, which included the formation of SMCs. The engagement of the SMC members was entirely voluntary, but their leadership roles were important in the school's management. An elected representative of a Ward Office further clarified the importance of local Government. He told me:

Our Ward office facilitates local development works. Any NGOs wishing to conduct the program in a school should come to the Ward office to seek approval and coordination. We document and study their proposal and decide whether to allow them to conduct the programs. NGOs cannot approach the schools directly. The Ward Office should be aware of the ongoing developments in its territory. Ward Office is liable to every concern of people.

Suppose an NGO does a vaccination program without consulting any government authorities. If there is a wrong impact of vaccines on people's health, who will be responsible.

(Mr Party, Elected Representative, Semi- Sahar ko school)

Mr Party's statement shows the public accountability of local governments as they are liable for all development works and activities in their territories. This also means that these governments are serious about the promotion of school education. I further found that the Setidevi Municipality was helping the Central Government with teacher management.

In Nepal, local governments support the Central Government in implementing the 2016-17 Teachers' Rationalisation and Redeployment Plan (see Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016c). The Central Government launched the plan through which the under-utilised teachers from a local government unit would be transferred to another local government unit with fewer teachers. There is a trend that public school teachers do not like to work in the Terai region and remote hilly regions. The Terai region is a plain in the south of Nepal bordered by India. The region has scorching temperatures compared to other parts of Nepal. In the remote hilly regions, there are poor living facilities and services such as electricity, roads, communications, internet, and health services. It is my experience that most teachers take their political party's

support and enjoy the privilege of working in cities. The unbalanced deployment of teachers is one of the problems of Nepali education (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016b, 2016c). Mr Curri, Education Officer at the *Semi-Sahar ko school* shared with me that after the formation of local governments in 2017, the Central Government assigned local governments to conduct surveys and provide teacher data. In this regard, he added:

In our Municipality, there are 32 schools and we have documented the details of our teachers. In some schools, there is an excess number of teachers. We have sent the data to the Central Government. The extra teachers in our Municipality will be relocated to other districts having few teachers.

(Mr Curri, Education Officer, Semi- Sahar ko school)

The Central Government administers the recruitment of teachers nationwide through the Teacher Service Commission. Before 2015, the Central Education Ministry and its 75 District Education Offices would administer school education in Nepal. The 2015 Constitution politically restructured the country into 753 local governments. Due to local influences and networking of these local governments, it was easier for local governments to collect teachers' data in their vicinity and support the teachers' management program.

The Setidevi Municipality prepared and implemented local curricula in public schools, and the *Semi-Sahar ko school* has already begun teaching the local curriculum to its students. The school accommodated students from 20-22 districts, so it was difficult for teachers to teach the curriculum to such diverse students. The social studies subject teacher at the school was assigned to teach the local curriculum, and he revealed to me that the curriculum had content related to local geography and history. He shared his experiences of implementing the local curriculum in his classes. He told me:

Teaching local curricula is a new practice and a bit challenging for us which is because our school has students from many districts. The local curriculum contains lessons from this Municipality only. We can teach students by comparing the subject matter, such as this tourist site is situated in the Setidevi municipality and people are getting benefits in these ways; what is happening in your Municipality back home.

(A social studies subject teacher, Semi- Sahar ko school)

The localisation of the 'local schooling curriculum' was an exciting idea for the social studies teacher. The curriculum of the Setidevi Municipality incorporated courses related to the

Municipality's geography, people and culture, indigenous skills, and tourist sites. The localities around the *Semi- Sahar ko school* were the semi-urban settlements of Lalitpur, and the residents were engaged in commercial vegetable farming and the livestock business. Koteswor is the traditional settlement of the Newari people, and the Bhanjyang is a popular hilltop tourist destination. I found that these social, cultural, and geographical identities of the Municipality were incorporated into the curriculum. I interacted with a local teacher at the school, Mr Dada, who expressed his happiness with implementing the curriculum. With delight, he shared with me:

Our Municipality office has already developed local curriculum for Grades 1 to 8, which is exemplary work. The students now learn about local dresses, cultures, and religious places inside our municipality through the textbooks. This is a significant transformation in school education.

(Mr Dada, Teacher, Semi- Sahar ko school)

Mr Dada was assured that implementing the local curriculum would preserve and promote his community's identity regarding people, geography, and culture. "Previously, the school would prefer to teach extra English when there was no local curriculum," he said. He added "Now, it is a matter of pride for the locals of the Setidevi Municipality to endorse their local curriculum". The Head Sir of the *Semi Sahar ko school* was also excited to implement the local curriculum in his school for which he had collaborated with the Setidevi Municipality. He mentioned:

The local curriculum will transfer local skills to the new generation. For instance, at Koteswor, some clothing industries adopt indigenous technologies. The local curriculum teaches students how clothes such as sweaters, mufflers, and woollen clothes are made in a factory. The students will learn and explore tourist destinations like *Bhanjyang* in our Municipality. This knowledge transfer is helpful in generating employability for students in the future.

(Mr Dhyana, Head Sir, Semi- Sahar ko school)

All the schools in the Setidevi municipality followed the local curriculum, the development of which had been authorised by Nepal's Government. A local curriculum is part of Nepal's 2019 National Curriculum Framework (Nepal Curriculum Development Center, 2019), and local stakeholders related to the *Semi-Sahar ko school* were delighted to have their curriculum. Mr Curri, the Education Officer of the Setidevi Municipality described:

There is a claim that the local curriculum is not helpful in urban public schools. I have a different perception of this claim. I gained an experience during my official visit to Korea. During the visit, the Korean Officials taught us the Korean language for a day. Similarly, when we went to Japan, the Japanese team served us Japanese tea and food, and we learned about their dances and artwork. These are their national identities, due to which only a nation exists.

The national curriculums see everything at the macro level, such as the moon, universe, and oceans. Local curriculums are developed to teach the new generations about local places, people, history, cultures, festivals, and skills. In our municipality, local curriculum will be taught in public and private schools.

(Mr Curri, Education Officer, Semi- Sahar ko school)

Coincidentally Mr Curri is also a local at the Setidevi Municipality. His views about the local curriculum helped me to understand the relevance of local curricula in urban public schools where most students are migrants. The efforts of the Setidevi Municipality to endorse local curricula and its acknowledgement by the Education Officer, Head Sir, and teachers in the *Semi-Sahar ko school* were praiseworthy. This indicates that local governance of schooling education has addressed the sentiments of school stakeholders to represent local identities through the curriculum.

The Gaau ko school: Near Administrative Services and Handling of the COVID pandemic

The Kalidevi Rural municipality initiated several approaches to education reform after its formation in 2017. One of these was implementing the 2019 Local Education Act, which includes several ideas on educational development, school governance, and teacher management. A teacher at the *Gaau ko school* added on the roles of the Rural Municipality shared:

We now receive our salary on time. Previously, the District Education Office (DEO) was our line-manger office, and it was situated in the distant city. The education-related notices of the Central Education Ministry would get posted only on the notice board of the DEO. We would never receive those notices on time. The situation has changed as the Kalidevi Rural Municipality circulates every notice to all schools.

(Mr Hotel, Teacher representative in SMC, Gaau ko school)

Mr Hotel's satisfaction showed that the handover of school education to local governments benefitted the rural schools in Lalitpur because administrative work related to the school

became fast and efficient. In addition, the Kalidevi Rural Municipality also showed its leadership role during the COVID outbreak. The COVID pandemic induced many changes in the lives of the Head Sir, Mr Purba, of the *Gaau ko school* who was new to his position, and none of the school stakeholders had ideas about how to continue teaching-learning activities during the pandemic. The Central Government, the Kalidevi Rural Municipality, and the SMC of the *Gaau ko school* could not decide about resuming physical classes. The Head Sir explained:

We tried to begin online teachings. Due to geographic constraints, most places have no internet connection so we could not proceed with the online classes. Kalidevi Rural Municipality called the Head Teachers' meetings two times. We all suggested resuming the schools physically as we are situated in a rural region, and the chance of spreading the COVID virus was significantly less. (Mr Purba, Head Sir, Gaau ko school)

None of the stakeholders would risk reopening the school closed due to COVID. The first wave of the pandemic gradually eased in the rural Lalitpur from September 2020 onwards. The uncertainty of schools' reopening continued until the Central Government issued the school reopening guidelines in November 2020. After the issuing of the guidelines, Kalidevi Rural Municipality provided permission to schools to begin face-to-face classes. Afterwards, Mr Purba consulted with parents by telephone, and they all suggested reopening physical classes, which since then have been continuously conducted in the *Gaau ko school*.

The COVID pandemic indeed brought several disruptions to school education. Everyone was scared during the earlier days of the pandemic's outbreak in March 2020, and people were afraid to come out of their houses. The infection gradually spread from cities to villages, but in the Kalidevi Rural Municipality, people gradually realised that if they applied safety measures, they could stay safe from the pandemic. The SMC Chair of the *Gaau ko school* told me:

Our village opened educational institutes very late because our Municipality Office did not want to take risks in our children's lives. Later we realised that schools could be opened by applying health safety measures. We decided not to push our students' future one year back by the closing school as this would be a significant loss in children's lives. Our Rural Municipality Office then facilitated the opening of the schools. (Mr Boss, SMC and the Ward Chair, Gaau ko school)

The leadership role of the Kalidevi Rural Municipality contributed to reopening public schools, which were closed for a long time due to COVID. The Municipality had concerns about students'

health and safety, and learning loss due to prolonged school closures, but it showed its responsibility towards students during the period of the crisis.

The *Gaau ko school* has no local curriculum developed yet; however, my participants realised the curriculum's importance was related to their livelihoods. In the *Khaldo Bazaar*, I talked with locals and listened to their stories about lives and livelihoods in the rural region. I was amazed to see people's engagement in different ways of earning a living as presented in the following scenarios.

Scenario One: Bamboo Crafts

On April 2, 2021, the former Head Sir of the *Gaau ko school* allowed me into his house to interview him. In the courtyard of his house, I met his father, who was joyfully knitting a bamboo basket. The father was probably 75 years old with a white beard and wrinkled face. He was using his sickle to cut bamboo into long slices, which were carefully kept in one corner. His work reflected his long years of experience in weaving baskets. In the backyard of his house, I could see big bamboo plants being grown. The bamboo baskets are commonly used in every rural house in Nepal to collect firewood, fodder, and green leaves as well as to carry domestic animals and heavy loads.

Scenario Two: Broom Making

In the rural settlement of *Khaldo Bazaar*, a person opened a broom-making and selling shop. The person used locally grown grass to make brooms. In Nepali communities, people make a broom from a local plant called *Amriso*⁴³ and these plant-based brooms are used in every Nepali house.

Scenario Three: Dairy Business

On April 17, a parent of the *Gaau Ko school*, Mr Khawa, invited me to his house to see his dairying concern. When I reached his house, he was occupied with his wife and son preparing the milk products. The concern was small in scale, but it produced several milk-based products such as *khuwa*, *panir*, and *pustakari*⁴⁴. All these dairy items were to be sold in the

⁴³A grass species with the scientific name *Thysanolaena Maxima*

⁴⁴Dairy foods and sweeteners used in cuisines in Nepali communities

market. The business was situated close to a local temple and the devotees would come to buy their products. The materials used for products were wood and milk, which were locally available. As a new business, Khawa's family started farming *loth salla*⁴⁵, a local herb favoured by region's temperature and climate, which is said to treat cancer. I could see a nursery of the *loth salla* in his land.

Scenario Four: Organic Farming

My field visit to the *Gaau ko school* was in April, which is a dry month in Lalitpur. Usually, farmers cannot grow vegetables and foods during the dry season due to low rainfall. In contrast in my study area at the *Khaldo Bazaar*, I could see the green farmlands covered with vegetables. People were irrigating their land through the water canals brought from the river, and some people were using cow dung as organic fertiliser. People sold those organic vegetables to sustain their livelihood, and as every house had cows and buffaloes, farmers would also sell milk. The local collectors even transported the vegetables and milk to cities every morning. Interestingly, using the canals, locals were generating small amounts of electricity, running water mills and gaining other economic benefits.

My observations as storied through the scenarios about the life and livelihood of people in the rural settlement of *Khaldo Bazaar* in Lalitpur were significant findings for me. I noted them carefully because these skills and potentialities were important knowledge systems of the rural people. However, after listening to some following views of my research participants, I doubt that these rural knowledges will be preserved and transferred to the newer generation.

A local youth shared:

I study and reside in the city and have joined a college there. My house is situated in this rural region. Today, I have come to the village to participate in the volleyball match on behalf of my settlement. After this match is over, I will return to the city on my motorcycle.

A parent expressed:

After completing high school exams, males do not prefer to stay back in the village. They go to the city, join colleges there, and work part-time.

⁴⁵Its scientific name is *Taxus Contorta*

A local teacher stated:

My two sons study engineering subjects in the colleges in the city. My elder son is planning to go abroad.

The comments of the youth, parent, and teacher indicate that the younger generation does not want to stay in the village, and young people wish to get a good education at city colleges. They want to earn money and have independent lives. At the same time, I explored that rural people in the Kalidevi Rural Municipality have indigenous ways of survival and they are enriched with the wisdom of knowledge. Although there seems to be a big gap between the rural people's social and cultural foundation and the desires of young people, education can help to connect a society's identity and knowledge systems with its youth. Unfortunately, due to the unavailability of a local schooling curriculum, the documentation and transfer of this local knowledge was not happening in the context of the *Gaau ko school*.

After the 2017 local elections and the formation of the local governments, the debate to prepare and implement local curricula was ignited in the Kalidevi Rural Municipality. The SMCs and school administrators in the Rural Municipality pressured the Education Office to draft the Local Curriculum. The Education Officer held a different perspective on the local curriculum. He shared:

Parents ask English education for their children, and Head Sirs ask me to make local curriculums. I do not hold expertise to make a curriculum. The Central Government has not provided curriculum-making training to our Municipality.

Everybody asks my office to maintain quality education in all schools. How can I guarantee this? I accept that this is ensured through the effective use of the curriculum and providing training to teachers.

(Mr Paschim, Education Officer, Gaau ko school)

I agreed with the Education Officer in two ways. Firstly, effective curriculum implementation in schools helps ensure quality education. Secondly, the inability of Education Officers to develop the local curriculum is due to a lack of training. In this context, I found low parental awareness about the local curriculum in the *Gaau ko school*. The PTA Chair, a former student of the school, owned a dairy business in the village and was a university graduate; however, he expressed his

lack of knowledge about the provision of local schooling curriculum and its importance. After I shared some examples of some local curriculum of other municipalities, he replied:

I am not aware of the local curriculum. As you shared, I feel the necessity of such curriculum at our place. There are many local contexts to write this curriculum. We have indigenous dairy technology which produces *khuwa*, *pustakari*, and *panir*. Our region is geographically suitable for loth salla (a species of pine), which is used as herbal medicine. In our forests, there are many herbal medicinal plants. We have ancient temples and Buddhist *Gumbas*. This region is a popular vegetable and dairy pocket zone in Lalitpur. We can teach these local issues to our children.

(Mr Bike, PTA Chair, Gaau ko school)

As mentioned above, Mr Bike suggested many ideas that could be included in the local curriculum. "Local governments should take the lead on this curriculum-making," said the PTA Chair. Mr Bike's statements expressed his desire for a better education system for his children. He also believed that the political leadership in the Municipality could only bring positive changes to the teaching and learning activities in the *Gaau ko school*. He further mentioned:

These days, education is impractical. I have completed my bachelor's study but could not find related jobs. My certificates are not saleable in the market. I could not get technical education in my village. Then, I became a dairy entrepreneur. I only use my education to read, write, and calculate math. The local curriculum in schools may address the unemployment concerns of youths. This curriculum is more relevant in our rural schools as all the students is locals.

(Mr Bike, PTA Chair, Gaau ko school)

Mr Bike views the local curriculum as a magic wand connecting learning with livelihood. I talked with another parent, Mr Khawa, who was a dairy entrepreneur and had served in the Nepal Armed Police Force for eight years. He shared with me:

I am not much aware of the local curriculum in schools. Education, indeed, has to be practical and suit our context. Suppose I am asked to suggest the contents of the local curriculum, I can share my expertise regarding the herbal medicines of our locality, the management and production in the dairy industry, and personal safety training.

(Mr Khawa, Parent, Gaau ko school)

These views indicate that concern for the local schooling curriculum is gradually surging in the Kalidevi Rural Municipality. People expressed their expectations that the local government would create such a curriculum. I would like to wrap up this finding with an interesting

statement from the SMC Chair of the Gaau ko school, which justifies the necessity of the local government's guardianship in school education. He shared with me:

It is a common practice in Nepal that elected bodies hold various executive positions in public organisations. Even the Prime minister is the Controller of universities and Chair of the National Planning Commission in Nepal. His designation seems ceremonial, but he has occupied the post for implementing his party's policy and vision. The same case applies to our school.

As elected bodies, we are here for at least five years with the people's mandate. Due to this, we feel more responsibility to take care of public institutions. Political people cannot remain passive in a community. We are accountable for every social and developmental activity inside this Ward.

If someone who can mobilise the resources becomes the SMC Chair, it benefits the school. The major problem with public schools is the low budget, and people like me can bring more funding to schools.

(Mr Boss, SMC and the Ward Chair, Gaau ko School)

He then added,

A few decades back, school administration (teachers and bureaucrats) was dominant in public education, but they could not yield quality outputs. In recent periods community and its representatives have been given the responsibility of school management. This policy will not remain forever. It is subjected to revision with the necessity of time, people, and context.

(Mr Boss, SMC Chair, Gaau ko School)

The interaction with the SMC Chair reminded me that Nepali educational laws allow community members and their elected representatives to lead a school's management. Further, people who are engaged in political parties have a devotion to work for people and community. These party cadres dedicate their time for a school's overall development.

I have presented findings related to the positive impacts of politics on school education. Political power and influence attract school stakeholders, and the practices of local governance in education supports managerial reforms and educational governance of public schools. The following findings are about the negative influences of politics on school governance. The stories shared by participants indicate that power exercises amongst school stakeholders impact schools' politicisation and keep communities away from governance roles.

6.2 Politics as a Negative Force on School Governance: Keeping Locals Away

In my research, participants perceived the local governments, SMCs, and teachers' unions as representing political parties and that these parties intended to control school authorities. I found that SMCs and teachers' unions carry out party activities so that the teachers get benefits regarding professional growth and security. The participants' narratives uncovered that politics is increasing schools' dependency on donors and eroding school-community relations. I present findings about three negative forces that influence school governance: *local governments and SMCs, teachers' union, and increasing the school's dependency on donors.*

6.2.1 Local Governments and SMCs: Cultivating Party Politics in School?

In Nepal, there are 753 local governments formed through periodic elections every five years, and the first local governments were formed for the period of 2017/18 to 2021/22. The local governments have political authority to assume guardianship of schools, as mentioned in the 2015 Constitution. I now focus on the influence of political parties in local governments and the SMCs of public schools, which have politicised the school environments.

The Sahar ko School: Elected Representatives Leading the SMCs

The 2020 Local Education Act of the Patan Metropolitan City mentions that elected Ward representatives shall lead the SMCs. Because party representatives will chair the SMCs, *Sahar ko school's* teachers view this provision sceptically as it would mean political interference in schools. I talked to the Head Sir of the *Sahar ko school*, and he explained:

Our Municipality's Local Education Act (2020) contradicts the 1971 Education Act of Nepal (amended in 2016). The elected Ward Chair or the person recommended by the Ward committee shall now be the president of the SMC in all schools in Patan Metropolitan city. The 1971 Education Act of Nepal says that Ward Chair is a member of the SMC but not the Chair. Policymakers' logic is that if the Ward Chair is the president of the SMC, the school will get government funding quickly. However, I am not confident with this view. This new provision of our Municipality could institutionalise political interference in school systems.
(Mr Naya, Head Sir, Sahar ko school)

Mr Naya's comments signal dissatisfaction over the decision to give local government control of school governance. However, as a Head Teacher, he holds less political authority to present his views against the local government's decision-making. The Eighth Amendment of the 1971

Education Act of Nepal in 2016 has a provision that the school stakeholders are authorised to select the SMC Chair and who could be anyone of the locals, parents, elected representatives, and social workers (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b). However, in the case of the Patan Metropolitan city schools, only the Ward Chair or any member of the Ward Committee shall become the SMC Chair. Mr Naya further added:

When the provision to include the elected Ward representatives in the SMC was being drafted, we (teachers) expressed our dissatisfaction. However, the teachers' union could not stand firmly on the teachers' side. This was because the local government's Mayor, deputy Mayor, and the teachers' union leaders represented some political parties with conflict of interests. The union accepted the draft of the local government without presenting any argument.
(Naya, Head Teacher, Sahar ko school)

Mr Naya's views indicate how power relations between local governments and teachers' unions instigated the legislation that teachers oppose. The deputy Head Teacher, Ms Nitu, was also concerned about the new provision regarding the SMC. She pointed out:

First, the Ward's representatives won the local election because of their political identities. After winning the elections, they cannot leave their political ideologies because of their background and power relations. The elected Ward representative will be SMC Chair as per the new provision. Our SMC team could have a political division because it has members representing different political parties. Second, the dominant priority of the Ward representatives is local development work and service to people. If a Ward Chair also becomes the Chair of all the public schools in the Ward, it will be difficult for them to focus on other works.
(Ms Nitu, Deputy Head Teacher, Sahar ko school)

The views of Mr Naya and Ms Nitu indicate that a political person leading a SMC derails the academic improvement of schools. Political differences could bring division amongst SMC members, which means tense situations could arise in the school's management. Regarding the role of politics in schools, I talked to the Education Officer of Patan Metropolitan City who has worked in both rural and urban areas as a school supervisor. She indirectly agreed that politics had eroded public education in Nepal. She explained:

Politics is everywhere including school education. In village areas, it is visible during the formation of the SMCs. In our municipality, the 2020 Education Act allows the elected Ward Chair to be the SMC Chair. A political person is now the leader of a school.
(Ms. Paleti, Education Officer, Patan Metropolitan City)

The worry of the Officer signals the forthcoming political capture of SMCs by the elected representatives in the Patan Metropolitan City. Before 2015, the schools were under the control of District Education Offices, and the central command was the Education Ministry. At present, local governments take guardianship of schools and they seek to control the schools. I now look at the findings related to the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, where the local government directly nominates the SMC Chair.

The Semi-Sahar ko School: Municipality Nominates the SMC Chairs

It was an early morning in March 2021. My research- field visit was at the settlement in the Setidevi Municipality where the *Semi-Sahar ko school* was situated. I had arranged an appointment to meet with a local participant, Mr Ghar, but I reached the site early. As it was a cold morning, I went to a teashop to have a cup of tea, and after waiting a while, the tea-shop owner served me tea and potato curry. The locally grown potato was so tasty (it had the rural aroma of the semi-urban settlement), and he used the milk of his cows to make tea. He said that his family collected fodder and green leaves for their livestock from the surrounding community forests. He represented the Newari ethnic group in Nepal which has preserved their indigenous way of hospitality, food habits, farming practices, and natural resources management. Another fascinating scene from his shop was observing the young cyclists and trekkers travelling to Bhanjyang, which is a famous picnic spot on one of the hilltops in Lalitpur, close to the Setidevi Municipality. Many short-distance trekkers and cyclists from Kathmandu city travel to this hilltop for pleasure and recreation. This hilltop is also described in the local curriculum endorsed by the Setidevi Municipality.

The owner of the teashop was very talkative, and he asked about my role, identity, and purpose in coming to the place— this personal conversation with new people is expected in my society. I briefly shared with him my details and purpose as an education researcher and as a resident of Lalitpur. Meanwhile, a small child, the three-year-old grandson of the teashop owner, started to quarrel and asking him for his mobile phone. With his grandson, the owner was shy; he kept cooking tea and uttering some words that I could not hear clearly. I conversed with him:

Me: In which school have you enrolled your grandson?

Owner: He attends a private school in Koteswor [the neighbouring settlement].

Me: [Pointing towards the *Semi-Sahar ko school*] How is this school's educational quality to admit children?

Owner: The teaching-learning seems to have improved in recent times. However, the school environment is completely political. Ill-minded people have only intended to do corruption there. They make several rules that legitimise their entry into the SMC. They are constantly engaged in school construction work through which they can make money.

I was surprised to hear that the *Semi Sahar ko school's* closest neighbour had such negative perception towards the school's management. His words expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that people with political access can directly become the SMC Chair and members. He further shared:

I was a student in this school during 1970 and 80s. In that period, academic things would only happen. Around 1700 to 2000 students were enrolled from all adjoining settlements. The then-graduates became doctors, engineers, and top bureaucrats. Unfortunately, the educational quality of this school started degrading. Now, the students' number has been reduced by six times. Why will parents admit students here if the school cannot provide good education? Without good education, how will these students contribute to society and the nation?
(A tea shop owner, *Semi-Sahar ko school*)

The tea shop owner was indirectly blaming to the Setidevi Municipality Office for politicising the school's environment. Being a resident and former student in the *Semi Sahar ko school*, he had no faith in the school's administration and students' achievements there. Nationally, public schools academic achievements in Nepal have dropped (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2020b), and the tea shop owner viewed politics as the primary cause.

After conversing with the teashop owner, I met Mr Ghar, another research participant. He was a local and an ex-student of the *Semi-Sahar ko school*. I could see the ongoing dismantling work of one of the school buildings from his house. Due to the dismantling work, I had to put on a facemask to prevent dust inhalation. I greeted Namaskar to Mr Ghar and as he owned a grocery shop at his house, we sat in a corner of the shop. I began the discussion by asking about the construction work in the school. I asked him if he had any ideas about it. He shared:

All these construction works in the school are looked after by the SMC. We do not have any concerns or ideas about these works.

(Mr Ghar, Local and ex-student, Semi-Sahar ko school)

This statement by the resident was shocking to me. It seemed that the school did not have a consultative relationship with local people. The house of Mr Ghar adjoined the school, but he was not aware of the recent developments in the school. The 1971 Education Act states that SMCs have to represent locals (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b; Sharma, 2008), because local representation helps a school to receive community support. In relation to the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, I found no active participation from locals. The present SMC Chair was a party leader of the Setidevi Municipality, and he was not a local, former student of the school, or a parent. In this regard, I further talked to Mr Ghar about the formation of the SMC. In some distress, he explained:

The Setidevi Municipality office (local government) nominates the SMC Chair of public schools. This is the beginning of politicisation in school environments because officials in the Municipality send political party members to the SMCs. After the SMC Chair is selected, the Chair nominates other members who favour their political ideologies. The SMC team is formed depending on which political party leads the local government.

(Mr Ghar, Local and ex-student, Semi-Sahar ko school)

In the *Semi-Sahar ko school's* context, the local government has been able to bring changes in public education, such as endorsing the 2019 Local Education Act, local curriculum, and textbooks, and facilitating teachers' capacity-building programs. However, stakeholders in the community perceive that their local government is influencing politics in the school environment. People blame the government for bypassing the community and nominating their political cadres as school leaders. Locals such as the tea shop owner and Mr Ghar feel that politics is distancing locals from the school.

The Gaau ko school: SMC Chair and the Ward Chair are the Same

I recall my first day visit to the *Gaau ko school* in April 2021. On the day, my liaison, Mr Pandit, took me to the Head Sir's office for a courtesy meeting. As we approached the office door, we noticed that the Head Sir was busy in another meeting discussing issues such as toilet construction, school buildings, money (50,000 Nepali Rupees= 650 NZ Dollars), and other

matters. The situation seemed stressful as everyone inside the room was talking loudly and simultaneously. We realised it was not the right time to see the Head Sir, so we left.

The next day, I returned to the Head Sir's office. He was busy on planning the exam halls, and another teacher was assisting him. I greeted Namaskar to both and waited until the Head Sir was free. After a while, he completed his work and started talking with me. I shared my research purposes with him, and he became interested to know that my research was about school governance. This was because he had also conducted similar research entitled *Parental Engagements in Public Schools* to submit for his promotion. Our first meeting helped me to develop a good rapport with him as we talked informally about our house locations, academic qualifications, the subject of my study, and family. While talking, I gradually found him distressed about his work, and I asked him if he was okay with his health. He replied that he was fine but was getting some work pressure these days. I guessed that his stress was linked with the previous day's debate in his office room which I had overheard whilst outside.

Later the same day, I met him again for his interview. I did not dare ask him about the previous day's event directly. Instead, I began the conversation by asking about the support the SMC and community people offered to him when he was under work pressure. He then revealed the cause of his tension:

In this school, the District Level Program Implementation Unit has budgeted 14 million Nepali Rupees for constructing two school buildings and 1.4 million for a toilet construction. Their engineers and overseers also come to monitor the construction activities and ensure quality work. The construction work of the first school building was initiated when the former Head Sir was in charge. The construction work seems carelessly done by the contractors because the newly coloured buildings are already discoloured, and most doors are broken in a year.

After I was appointed as the Head Sir here, we revised the construction plans. We decided to build the second building ourselves to maintain quality work. Thus, we handed the construction responsibility to one of our trusted SMC members. Unfortunately, that SMC member also did not perform a good work. Yesterday, he was here to ask us for the payment. As he has not done his job as agreed with the school and even the work is not completed, we have stopped his full payment. He was arguing with me to get his money back. I am surprised to see his dual character in the school. He is everything in this region, a local political activist, elected Ward member, educationalist, and SMC person. These kinds of unethical people have dictated and ruined the school education.

(Mr Purba, Head Sir, Gaau ko school)

Mr Purba's stories led me to understand the management-related pressure experienced by a Head Teacher. The building contractor, who was an SMC member and an elected representative, had negatively influenced the *Gaau ko school's* governance. I was interested to know the role of the SMC Chair and the members on these school issues. The Head Sir expressed:

The SMC should deal with all these external factors, including construction works. Unfortunately, I only have to take stress on all these works and equally focus on my academic roles. The contractor of our school building is an SMC member, and none of the other SMC members speaks against his faulty work. The SMC Chair is not serious about the school's issue, although he is the Ward Chair.
(Mr Purba, Head Sir, Gaau ko school)

I found the *Gaau ko school's* Head Sir was helpless to deal with management work despite nearly three decades of teaching experiences in public schools, including three years in the *Gaau ko school*. After the endorsement of the 2019 Local Education Act, he was nominated as a qualified and capable Head Teacher. Before the Act, low-qualified teachers were appointed as Head Sirs due to their political influence. Mr Purba, one of the best candidates for the Head Teacher, was selected through a competition. In his early days, Mr Purba was excited about reforming the school's education; however, I saw his energy spent due to the disarray of the working environment. He commented:

The role of local government in managing school education seems ineffective. These governments have new experiences with new local laws and policies. They are rightful to take guardianship of school education. But if the local government holds every responsibility, they cannot fulfil all due to their new experiences and political biases. Until now (after the local elections in 2017 to 2020), no observable changes have been seen in this place. Previously, the District Education Office would accomplish the teachers' work, such as salary distribution, promotion, and capacity building. Now, local governments are unable to manage these things professionally. These governments are inefficient in managing the macro-level issues of school education.
(Mr Purba, Head Sir, Gaau ko school)

The view of the Head Sir could be confirmed as these governments had no previous work experience and were learning many things. One could further presume that the *Gaau ko school's* stakeholders were satisfied with having the Ward Chair as its SMC Chair, and the

school had progressed a lot; however, the situation was not encouraging. Mr Purba further disclosed:

Politics are rampant in this school. The SMC is occupied by political persons who do nothing for this school. I have learned that I will also do politics while forming a new SMC to bring more parents to the committee. Only the parents will be serious about the school's growth. These other people (in the SMC) have come to do social service. They have invested money in a nearby private school and are now acting as a social worker for the public school.

(Mr Purba, Head Sir, Gaau ko school)

Mr Purba intended to engage more parents in the SMC so that their collective voices and actions would bring positive reforms to the school. Politically motivated people get direct entry to schools through the SMCs. In this context, Mr Purano expressed a similar concern:

It is unfortunate that, during the formation of SMC, the members are pre-determined by political parties. Political parties send their cadres in the committee according to the quota they bear through a kind of mutual understanding. Earlier, there were only parental representations in the SMCs. Due to flexible policies at present, anyone can enter the school committees.

(Mr Purano, Ex-teacher and local, Gaau ko school)

Party politics is rooted in the school governance structures and has been unhelpful for educational growth. My next participant was the Education Officer of the Rural Municipality Office to whom I had been introduced by the Head Sir. As it was the first hour⁴⁶ of office time, the Education Officer seemed relaxed in his office. I introduced myself and shared my research purpose. I informally talked about his role and settings, such as his home district, former college and degree, and his recruitment year as an officer. This initial conversation helped me to develop rapport with him. He provided me with educational documents related to his municipalities, such as an education bulletin, a local educational Act, a school calendar, and other materials. I found the documents helpful in exploring secondary information related to the *Gaau ko school*.

While scanning the documents provided, the Vice-Chair of Kalidevi Rural Municipality entered the room. She asked the officer to computer type the words 'Ladies' and 'Gents' in big letters and print them out. The Education Officer obviously was uncomfortable to do this work

⁴⁶ The first hour in Nepali bureaucracy is generally considered from 10 to 11 am. Many government staffs arrive at their offices in this period. They read newspapers, drink tea, and gossip with their colleagues. They hardly work during the first hour, although the office start time is 10 am sharp.

in front of me and he asked his assistant to do that. Later I learned that the Rural Municipality had organised a workshop relating to the local judiciary in a nearby hotel. The printed notices were to be pasted on the toilets' doors to inform the guests. The officer remained speechless after the order from the Vice-Chair. He may have felt embarrassed following such an order in front of me. I did not ask questions of him on that day.

On another day, as per the officer's time availability, I again visited his office. He first asked me to meet the Administrative Head of the office and seek his permission to conduct his [the officer's] formal interview. This was the protocol of his office, which I followed. Once the officer was ready for the interview, I asked my pre-prepared questions about school governance, school-community relations, community values in school governance, the role of SMCs, and local education policies. However, I found him more interested in discussing political influences on the education system. Some of his responses were indirect and diplomatic, which could be due to his position as a government officer. He shared an incident that he had experienced:

Politics has badly affected the education system. Education will only improve if the upper [Central Government] policies are sound. The issues of less permanent teachers and an explicit curriculum should be sorted out first. Education Officers are not allowed to work independently at local levels.

Once, an NGO came up with a program to implement in a school. As it was school exam day, I asked them to come after the exams would finish. They complained about this to the Chair of the Rural Municipality. Later, I was blamed for obstructing local development works, making me feel bad. I cannot go against these happenings. Instead, I listen to the government authorities and follow what they say.

(Mr Paschim, Education Officer, Kalidevi Rural municipality)

The two incidents recounted above, the order by the Vice-Chair and the unnecessary interference by the Chair of the Kalidevi Rural Municipality, were both unusual to the Education Officer of the Rural Municipality. He was a young and energetic officer who had secured his first position while passing the government's selection exam for the Education Officer. I saw him frustrated with the political chaos inside the Municipality. Following my query about the role of the Education Office in ensuring quality education, he shared:

Everyone (schools, his boss, and I) seeks quality education output from me. However, there are some other influential factors behind the curtain. For instance, we cannot interfere with the planning of local budgets. The local government does not seek our suggestions while drafting educational plans and allocating budgets. After everything is finalised, they ask us to implement it without question.

In many cases, the budget headings in educational development are mysterious. For instance, this year, a Ward committee in this municipality has allocated 175,000 Nepali Rupees [2300 NZ Dollars] to one of the schools under the heading 'as per the need of school'. Being a government staff, I have to abide by the orders of the Municipality. Later the financial auditors will ask me, "Why are you investing in an area which need was not identified earlier? Why weren't you responsible the budget? Why did you recommend the payment?" I have to clarify the auditors regarding the decision of the Municipality in which I am not involved.

(Mr Paschim, Education Officer, Kalidevi Rural municipality)

The Education Office is a subordinate to the Kalidevi Rural Municipality Office, so the Education Officer was never consulted by the Office when school budgets were allocated. This Officer's view showed the extreme level of political influence in decision-making by the local government. The elected representatives wished to please their voters through populist agendas such as budgeting to schools as they saw fit, but their lucrative agendas did not comply with the existing laws and policies. The work of the Education Officer was performed like a silent watchdog as he had no authority to stop all these political manoeuvrings in public education. In an interview, a retired teacher of the *Gaau ko school* expressed:

In 1990, Nepal got its second democracy, and a multiparty ruling system began. Politics became liberal, which entered every public institution. This scenario created segregation in society, which was visible while allocating school budgets. Central leaders and administrators would only lend funds to the schools if the SMC Chair, Head Sir, and Teachers belonged to their political panel. Political biases were taken for granted when developing the school infrastructure. This situation brought imbalances in educational development in the last three decades.

(Mr Purano, Retired teacher, Gaau ko school)

Mr Purano had taught for 44 years in Nepali public schools in rural Lalitpur villages, so he had a clear picture of political dominance in education. The local governments created a political atmosphere to show their strength in schools, so Head Teachers and Education Officers could not work independently.

The following findings are about the influence of party politics through the teachers' union in schools. I found that political parties use the union as an accessible forum to control school decisions and in return teachers receive the political privileges of job security and career growth.

6.2.2 Teachers' Union: Dominated by Ideologies of Political Parties

It was a Saturday in April 2021, and I was still in my data collection period at the *Khaldo Bazaar*, where the *Gaau ko school* is situated. The school was closed because it was a weekend holiday, and fewer people were in the market. It was a sunny morning. I was sitting at a local teashop, waiting for my morning meal and watching some pilgrims going to the Dham temple on the banks of the Rungun river. As I waited, two strangers arrived on a motorbike and stopped at the shop, where some school teachers of the region had already gathered to welcome them. Later I learned that the strangers were the district leaders of the Nepal Teacher's Union (NTU, which is the teachers' wing of the Nepali Congress party. These leaders were at the *Khaldo Bazaar* to meet fellow teachers of their party and to discuss reforming their union. I observed the event from a distance, as it was held openly at the teashop. After some time, many teachers gathered at the shop and filled in the form related to '*Karmath*⁴⁷ Teachers. NTU's website mentioned that a teacher who had actively worked for the union for the last four years was eligible to be upgraded to the designation of '*Karmath Teacher*' (Nepal Teachers Union, 2022). I realised that this process was a political path for a teacher to hold power at the local level and maintain a relationship with the top leaders of their mother party.

The Semi-Sahar ko School: Tacit Understanding amongst Teachers to Engage Politically

In January 2021, I was preparing for my research, such as finalising the questions list to ask participants in the field, scanning the list of potential participants, and identifying the potential schools. I used social media, such as Facebook, to maintain contact with the school Head Sirs in Lalitpur. While scanning my friends' Facebook posts, I suddenly stopped on a photo post by the *Sahar ko school's* Head Sir [later I chose this school for my research]. The Head Sir was inaugurating a program that looked like a teachers' gathering in the Setidevi Municipality.

⁴⁷ Literally this means diligent in duties

Alongside the chief guest of the program was an Honourable Member of Parliament who belonged to the CPN-Maoist party of Nepal. On the program's banner, it was written that the organiser was the All-Nepal Teachers Association (ANTA), Setidevi Municipality branch. ANTA is a teacher wing of the CPN-Maoist party, and the *Semi Sahar ko school's* Head Sir is the Chair of ANTA in the Setidevi Municipality. One and a half months later, I met the Head Sir at his school for my research interview. I asked the same question about his engagement in the teacher unions. He replied:

I am affiliated with one of the teachers' unions. Being a member of such union is essential for our professional security and network development. A public-school Head Sir is responsible for academic improvements and bringing funding for the school's development. If only we have a good network with bureaucrats, politicians, and NGOs, we can bring desired changes in a school. Without a strong relationship with high-level people, we might miss many opportunities.
(Mr Dhyan, Head Sir, Semi- Sahar ko school)

It looks like a brilliant idea if the political connections of a school can help to create more resources. However, these types of engagements of teachers can hamper the teaching-learning processes. I further asked Mr Dhyan, how the teachers prioritised their work at the school. He commented:

In this school, our teachers are affiliated with different trade unions. I allow them to take part in the union's program. I also go to attend different programs related to my union. We have some tacit understanding such as we do not hamper our teaching duty, bring any political conflicts into school, and use politics for our professional security and school's development. Thus, our school teachers have little differences due to politics.
(Mr Dhyan, Head Sir, Semi- Sahar ko school)

The *Semi-Sahar ko school's* teachers belonged to different politically affiliated trade unions, but the school was making good progress in education and infrastructure development. This suggests that the school was using politics for its growth but not letting politics undermine the educational environment. The leadership of Mr Dhyan was praiseworthy in handling the teachers who belonged to different political ideologies and mobilising their strength for the school's benefit.

The Gaau ko School: Teachers are the Party Cadres?

Mr Purano had contributed four decades of his life as a teacher in rural Lalitpur. When I first met him at the *Khaldo* Bazaar for an interview, he was gossiping with his colleagues who were gathered at a local teashop. I greeted them and sat on a chair. Political debates being common in local teashops, they were discussing the political developments in Nepal in January and February 2021. The Prime Minister, K.P Sharma Oli, had dissolved the parliament and announced new elections, and in this context, Mr Purnao and his colleagues were analysing the judgment of the Supreme Court to reinstate the Nepal House of Parliament. Mr Purano was against the court's decision about restricting the autonomy of the elected government. Another teacher sitting close to Mr Purano said "Now the ruling communist party (led by Mr Oli) has lost the people's trust, so they should resign on moral grounds. Otherwise, the Nepali Congress party should lead the agitation against the government". Within these conversations, I sensed the political inclinations of the teachers were due to the ideologies they held. I asked Mr Purano if we could begin the interview. We had a short conversation before the interview began.

Mr Purano: Of course, why not? You can ask me questions here (in the presence of other people). My friends will help me answer questions if I cannot answer them.

Me: Sorry, sir. It is against research ethics to interview in the presence of other people.

Mr Purnano prepared to go to the nearby *Gaau ko school* premises for the interview. I discussed the different dimensions of education in the *Gaau ko school* that coincide with local value systems and governance. I was also getting a clear picture that politics was an integral part of public education in Nepal. I sought his views on this and his engagement in politics, if any. He shared:

I was in active politics until 1990. After the 1990 peoples' revolution in the country, I realised that politics is a dirty game. I believe that a teacher should not hold membership in any political party. However, having neutral political status, I faced many difficulties, such as the threat of transfer from school, suppression by the Head Sir, and others.

I still believe that teachers' engagement should be in academic works only, but practically it is not possible. My personal view does not agree with the national view. In Nepal, teachers can

become a member of unions such as the Nepal Teachers Association (belonging to the congress party), the All-Nepal Teachers Association (CPN Maoist party), and the Nepal National Teachers Association (CPN UML). These political unions of teachers are networked across the country. After getting membership in any of these unions, the teacher will automatically have a political identity.

It is true that if there is no politics, nothing works. However, a politically active person should only be involved in politics. Others may have faith in their party's ideologies and caste vote for the person they trust. If we go accordingly, only our country will make progress.

(Mr Purano, Retired teacher and local, Gaau ko school)

My conversation with the ex-teacher clarified that teachers' get affiliated with a party-based union to remain safe from the non-teaching pressures exerted by the school administration. Government regulations have also legitimised the party-based unions of teachers in Nepal. However, he accepted that politics should act as a means for school development. My other participants supported this view of Mr Purano. In an interview, a senior teacher, Mr Pandit, shared with me:

In Nepal, political parties are losing trust among people. During elections, I have a right to vote for one of these parties. Amongst these mischievous parties, I cast a vote for the Nepali Congress party as I see it as the best among the worst parties in Nepal. In *Khaldo Bazaar*, everyone knows that I belong to the Nepali Congress party. It is hard to survive professionally without carrying one's party's tag. I do not blindly follow any party and seek any political advantages. Otherwise, I could have already received a transfer to a city school and had a more privileged life. Many of my junior colleagues from this school currently hold good positions in city schools.

(Mr Pandit, Teacher, Gaau ko school)

These teachers' views indicated that it was not a choice but a compulsion to be a member of a politically affiliated trade union. Some teachers used the unions as a ladder to transfer to city schools and have better lives. Despite this, the voting right of teachers in elections was their political right, and they could even organise as a trade union. In this context, the political engagement of teachers was largely criticised by the *Gaau ko school's* parents.

Mr Khawa transferred his son to the *Gaau ko school* from a private school. In the Nepali educational context, schools changing from public to private is common but changing from private to public is unusual. Upon discussion, he expressed high expectations from the teachers

of the *Gaau ko school* as he had also studied there. However, he was dubious about the quality of education his son would receive from the school. He expressed his view:

Some years back the *Gaau ko school* was renowned in the entire southern Lalitpur. There used to be lots of games and extra-curricular activities at school. Teachers were not engaged in political activities in a visible way. There was networking among schools in this region and many sports competitions would happen. However, these things do not happen nowadays. The quality of education in the school has dropped by 90%.

I believe that teachers should be apolitical, and they should not be engaged in any profitable business. If they are engaged in such things, they will be distracted from delivering quality teaching. Unfortunately, many teachers in our village hold significant positions in local political parties, cooperatives, and Non-Government Organisations.

(Mr Khawa, Parent, Gaau ko school)

Parents are essential stakeholders in public schools as their suggestions and experiences can contribute a lot to a school making progress. Mr Khawa placed much hope in the school as his son's future was in the teachers' hands, but he believed that teachers' engagement in non-teaching activities, such as party politics or extra-curricular business, could undermine the school's academic environment.

I now move on to my findings on the influence of politics in increasing school's dependency on donors funding significant infrastructure projects. The participants' stories reveal donor aid includes contracts that schools must abide by, and that donor support eventually distances schools from their communities.

6.2.3 Increasing School's Dependency on Donors

As a former school teacher, I have experienced that public schools in Nepal have insufficient resources to build infrastructure, hire extra subject teachers, and arrange for basic educational facilities such as a library, science labs, and computers. I have found that politics is crucial to exploring and bringing in outside support from donors and governments to schools. In this discourse, schools are getting closer to government and donor support, and the small-scale support of the communities are often ignored. My research participants such as school teachers, locals, and parents have stories about the role of politics in attracting significant donations and weakening school-community relationships. In relation to this, I now present the

participants' narratives in my three study schools to show how aid to schools is considered by the school stakeholders.

The Sahar ko school: Aid Support is Top-Down

I present my brief interaction with the social studies teacher at the *Sahar ko school*. I had an informal catch-up with him during my visit to the school in February 2021. I was trying to explore more about the new school buildings from his perspective. The school had received aid to build three buildings from the DLPIU, and two of them had already been completed. As stated earlier, DLPIU is a project of Nepal Government to reconstruct the school buildings damaged due to the 2015 earthquake. This project is largely funded by international donors such as Asian Development Bank, Japan International Cooperation Agency, United States Agency for International Development, among others (Nepal Reconstruction Authority, 2021).

The social studies teacher explained to me how the school perceived the project in terms of the SMC's role in budgeting, supervising, and monitoring construction works, and the authority of the school's administration. He even praised the role of the SMC Chair and the Head Sir, who continuously lobbied different government offices to receive these building projects. The school profited by receiving such large funding for the building works; however, the teacher expressed some interesting facts about the budget. He shared:

This school is being built by the DLPIU which is a project of Nepal's Government. We must follow the building map of the DLPIU to construct the school building. In every storey, there has to be only two rooms. The walking passage between the rooms has to be very wide. In this whole two-storey building, there are only four rooms. If the school was allowed to work independently, we could construct six rooms with the same budget. Unfortunately, we cannot do so. If we dare to change the building map, [laughing], we will not get the project.
(Mr Social studies, Teacher, Sahar ko school)

The social studies teacher's views made me curious to see the rooms of the building first hand. I went to the construction site and saw that the teacher's comments were true. The rooms were huge and there were only two rooms in each storey. I thought there could be some reason to make such large rooms but none of my participants had an answer. Interestingly, I saw that there were no toilets inside building under construction, so I asked Mr Social about their provision; he replied:

Yes, we cannot make a toilet inside the school building. Toilets have to be built on open ground. Even the colour of the school building has to be yellow. The DLPIU manages the top-down plans in schools. Every school has its different issues and needs. Our school has few students in a class, so we do not require larger classrooms. We need more classrooms because we are upgrading classes to Grade Eleven from this year. We have no say in this. This building model of the DLPIU is being applied nationwide with the same building map, colour, and without toilets. The centralised mindset of the government and the clauses of donors guides this.
(Mr Social, Teacher, Sahar ko school)

The teacher's narrative reveals that a public school seeks an arrangement with donors for the school's benefit, but this funding comes with contracts that the schools must abide by. In this situation, the schools are helpless as they cannot critically argue with the donors. The SMC also has no say in these top-down decisions of donors, and if a school expresses any disagreement, the donors might withdraw from the project.

The Semi-Sahar ko school: Locals are not Aware of the Large Donations by NGOs

In the Setidevi Municipality, community people proactively established the *Semi-Sahar ko school* in the 1950s. Until the 1990s, almost all the students in the school were local and the school had earned the trust of the parents and students from the adjoining settlements. After the 1990s, private schools mushroomed in the country as Nepal adopted economic liberalisation policies. Private schools were competitors to public schools, and gradually parents started enrolling their children in private schools as these schools had better academic results.

I found that in the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, 70 per cent of students are migrants and the rest are locals. Most of the local students of the settlement go to private schools. Fewer local children were enrolled in the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, indicating locals' concerns about support systems which were gradually reducing. During my visit to the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, I had some informal conversations with local people, such as a tea shop owner and Mr Ghar, both of whom had negative perceptions towards the school. Mr Mate, a parent, agreed that there is a growing dissatisfaction amongst parents towards the school. He stated:

The societal understanding of public schools is changing these days but negatively. People do not show concern for the school. They do want to know the happenings inside the school. All

the locals earn good money now. They have enrolled their children in private schools. Some of the teachers at our school have admitted their children to private schools.

(Mr Mate, A parent and SMC member, Semi- Sahar ko school)

In the past, everyone in the semi-urban settlement in the Setidevi Municipality would study in the *Semi-Sahar ko school*. Now, the only locals whose economic situation is not good and/or who belong to the so-called low caste groups, such as Dalits, and people who migrate from villages for work admit their children to the *Semi-Sahar ko school*. Nowadays, local students from semi-urban settlements go to private schools wearing school uniforms. It is challenging for a public school to win the trust of people. In recent times, there seems to be a growing gap of trust between the local community and the *Semi-Sahar ko school*. People see the school negatively due to poor educational outcomes and the dominance of party politics in the SMCs.

In this context, Mr Dhyan, the Head Sir of the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, was trying to bridge the communication gap between the school and the community. He indicated that dedicated school leadership was needed to encompass the community within the school systems. He revealed how the *Semi-Sahar ko school* was getting external support.

JICA is providing us with the 70 million Nepali Rupees budget to build this new building. SMC did the need assessment of the new building, and the report was submitted to the donor. After assessing all submitted documents and tracing the school's history, we were offered the project of the new building.

(Mr Dhyan, Head Sir, Semi Sahar ko school)

Mr Dhyan expressed that a school must develop its self-sufficiency so that it can influence the donors. The school requires modern infrastructure, but the support from local communities is often insufficient to build such big infrastructure projects. The traditional ways of getting donations in cash or goods from locals does not provide sufficient resources; thus, a school must rely upon big donors, such as the Government and NGOs. I was shocked by the views of two locals who live close to the school. A local, Mr Ghar, viewed that:

Only construction works are seen in the school. I do not know who is helping these. I also wonder if the students can read in this disturbed environment.

(Mr Ghar, A local, Semi- Sahar ko school)

Similarly, another local— the tea shop owner—told me that the school only focused on school building work rather than educational quality. He blamed the school leaders for engaging in school building work and receiving payments from the contractors. Locals like Mr Ghar and the tea Shop owner believed that the school should inform locals about the kind of funds donors give. In a different context, I learned that the *Semi-Sahar ko school* also owns a community forest and earns a small amount of money from it. The SMC Chair of the school told me:

There is one forest in the name of the school. The school sells wood and gets some income. However, I do not look at these small things because I focus on big things that bring visible changes in the school.

(Mr Neta, SMC Chair, Semi- Sahar ko school)

Neta's views indicate that local resources are insufficient to meet students' modern-day educational needs. Thus, the school relies upon external donors to fulfil its dream of educational growth. Meanwhile, the school still needs the support of communities for its morale and overall development.

Gaau ko school: Shifting of the Community's Value in Supporting the School

The efforts of the community in 1979 laid a good foundation for the education development at *Khaldo Bazaar*. The people were able to construct a school building to run secondary education at their place. In 2014, the Indian Embassy in Nepal built a big school building for the *Gaau ko school* by demolishing the older one, and after the 2015 earthquake, the DLPIU built two concrete buildings on the school premises. In the 60 years of the school's existence, the school has produced thousands of capable and educated people in the Southern Lalitpur region. Many positive changes are observed in the school's development in terms of educational quality, physical infrastructure, teachers, and extra-curricular activities. However, recently it seems that the school has started to depend upon big donors for its overall growth. The situation was quite different some decades back. Mr Purano recalled his memories:

In earlier times, there were no excellent physical infrastructures in our school. We played *Dheusi Vailo*⁴⁸ for fundraising, by which we purchased educational materials. The community, teachers, political party leaders, and students all gathered to make it happen.

⁴⁸ Cultural performance during the Tihar festival, which is performed by Hindu Nepalis

While constructing this school at *Khaldo Bazaar* in 1978/79, teachers, students, and parents carried wooden logs on their backs from another village. We even carried zinc sheets from Kathmandu for roofing the school building. At that time, everybody was united to build the school.

(Mr Purano, Retired teacher and local, Gaau ko school)

The people no longer need to carry wooden logs and do hard physical labour for the school. This is due to the advancement of time and modern changes observed in the rural community. Mr Hotel, a local teacher at the *Gaau ko school*, also believes that community support has declined recently. He shared:

The support of the community has reduced in recent years. Due to the government's support, schools are becoming sustainable. Now, there is no problem with paying salaries to teachers. Different projects come to schools for building construction, drinking water, toilets, distribution of sanitary pads, nursing programs, and others. The community need not have to give any monetary support to schools. Instead, people knock on political party leaders' doors to receive funding for the school.

(Mr Hotel, A local teacher, Gaau ko school)

Mr Hotel's view indicates that there has been a shift in the support system to public schools. Schools would depend upon communities in earlier times but now on local government, donors, and political leaders. The participants' experiences show a massive societal change in Nepal in recent decades, and politics is a cause of this. A community cannot contribute sizeable financial support to the school, so donors and local governments provide funds, which are more visible, for school infrastructure and operation. Schools can receive this high-profile financial support by using their political networks within different parties; however, communities are limited to helping schools by attending meetings and giving ideas. This influence of donors has possible risks of gradually widening school and community relations.

6.3 Chapter Summary

In Nepali education, political influence is significant in shaping group and community involvement in school governance. Political influences can be seen positively regarding power exercise in public schools through the SMCs. Local stakeholders work through the SMCs and engage in school management and construction works. The local governance of school

education is a political decision mentioned in the 2015 Constitution of Nepal. This provision has enabled locally elected governments to take responsibility for school education. These local governments have prepared local education acts and curricula and showed leadership abilities to sustain school education during the COVID pandemic.

In contrast, participants considered that politics negatively penetrates the school system. Local governments are preparing Local Education Acts to centralise their political authority and to show strength in school education. In many cases, local government representatives themselves chair the SMCs. The SMCs Chairs are the political appointees who intend to rule over the school's decisions and resources. The party-based teachers' unions show accountability to their mother parties for teachers' professional agendas of growth and security at work. Political persons are keen to bring outside funding from the governments and donors to schools; however, this activity limits the small-scale help of communities, such as gathering local resources, local participation, and local decision-making. This politicisation in schools is posing risks to school and community relations. Overall, politics is essential to reforming the management of public schools, and I discuss these findings in relation to New Public Management and Global Governance theories, in Chapter Seven. I now move on to Part Three, where I interpret the participants' stories and make their meanings by referring to the literature and theoretical explanations. In relation to school governance, I write the conclusion of the research with implications for scholarly communities and education policymakers.

Part Three

Exploring School Governance

In this third part of the research, I interpret the meanings of my narrative findings and present the research's implications and recommendations in relation to Nepali school governance. This part comprises Chapters Seven and Eight. Chapter Seven is the discussion chapter in which I make meanings of the participants' stories in three steps based on my reflection and the literature, theorisation, and exploring school governance. This chapter builds my argument to answer how Nepali school governance is constituted in the context of people's values and the influence of politics in Lalitpur schools. In Chapter Eight, I write the research's conclusions and their implications which I obtained from interpreting the narrative findings. My scholarly and policy recommendations will contribute to academic communities and education policymaking relating to school governance. To summarise, this final part of the research analyses the participants' stories and my field observation, and explores the meaning of school governance in Lalitpur, Nepal.

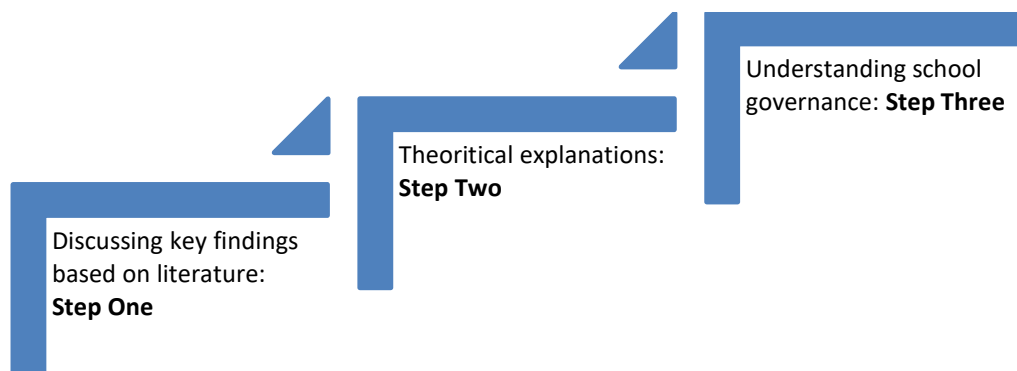
Chapter Seven

Discussion and Meaning Making

This chapter discusses the narrative findings about school governance as presented in Chapters Five and Six. I highlight the social and cultural values and the exercise of political power which build school governance in Lalitpur Nepal. Through the discussion, I bring my identities as a Lalitpur local, former public-school teacher, and a Hindu man. These identities and experiences helped me to delve into the participants' narratives about their local values and political influences on schools to explore meanings on school governance.

I have developed a model, shown in Figure 7, to systematise my discussion. Step one is the discussion of key findings based on my identities and experiences. Similar to the suggestion by Bavdekar (2015) about comparing and contrasting the findings with other studies, I referred to previous publications to find similarities and differences of my research's findings. In the Step Two, I bring theoretical interpretations of ideas that are developed from the first step. Theories help interpret the research's findings through an established worldview (Osanloo & Grant, 2016), and thus will help a researcher to understand and develop their ideas. Step Three develops an understanding of school governance from the theoretical interpretation and relates these it to research questions. I then situate the explorations of my research into the conceptual framework.

Figure 7 Steps on Meaning- making about School Governance



7.1 Step One: Discussion of the Key Findings

In the following section, I summarise the key narrative findings and discuss school governance in the context of people's local values and political influences. Initially, I discuss the findings on the local values related to Chapter Five in which my participants expressed the cultural and social values of groups and communities in Lalitpur, Nepal, that encourage working for school governance. Then I discuss the findings on political influences related to Chapter Six in which there are stories on how political influences shape groups and communities' involvement or otherwise in school governance in Lalitpur, Nepal.

7.1.1 Local Values in School Governance

The school governance model in Nepal engages multiple stakeholders, including parents, communities, teachers, Head Teachers, elected representatives, and Education Officers. Their cultural values play a significant role in building effective public-school governance in Lalitpur. Values are specific belief systems that shape people's identities, habits, and attitudes (Shrestha & Gupta, 2019), and values define society's regulations and people's actions (Schwartz, 2006). I found that community values can be observed in Nepali schools through people selflessly engaging in SMCs, uniting to make schools better, and adopting the Hindu values of peace and divinity. However, some orthodox mindsets of locals, social class hierarchies, patriarchy, and local supremacy, constrain sound governance practices. I discuss these findings as community engagement, the value of togetherness, religion and education, and the conservative mindsets. In the following section, I present the experiences of past communities and the community's present involvement in school governance. These experiences show how community values are constantly developing in Nepali society to support schools positively.

7.1.1.1 Community's Engagement in School Governance: Past and Present

Experiences of Past Generations

I found that people in earlier Nepali society were proactive in establishing schools by mobilising community strength. In Lalitpur, people raised funds, built schools, gathered children, and began to teach during the 1970s. There was an undemocratic political system called Panchayat from 1961-1990, during which all schools were nationalised, and education was controlled by central bureaucracy. However, people contributed to school infrastructure at

their personal cost; for instance, in 1993, Mr Hakki built a water tank at the *Sahar ko school* in memory of his late father. It is a Nepali cultural value to carry out philanthropic activities for communities in the memory of the deceased. On the school's premises, I observed a stone plaque consisting of the names of more than a hundred donors who supported the school with money, goods, and labour.

Similarly, in rural Lalitpur, I listened to the stories of hard work, teamwork, and the dedication of communities to establish the *Gaau ko school*. A kind person had donated his land to the school to upgrade it to secondary level. In Nepal, the land is a precious asset for rural families because of their engagement in agriculture. After the school received the land, the communities were organised to carry stones, mud, wood, zinc sheets, and other materials on their backs from distant cities to construct the school. This incident happened in 1980 when there were no accessible roads from the city to the rural villages, but it was a matter of pride for a community to have a secondary-level school at their place. Teachers, students, the community, and local politicians participated in cultural programs such as *Dheusi- vailo*⁴⁹ for fundraising.

The literature (Dhungel et al., 2013; Nepal Research Center for Educational Innovation and Development, 2009; Pradhan et al., 2019; Sharma, 2008; Shrestha, 2014) also claims that communities laid the foundation for education in Nepal. However, this literature has not explicitly explained the reasons behind the motivation of communities for school establishment. I have explored the reasons which encouraged past community involvement in school development. The first is the political reason. In 1846 to 1990, people in Nepal were bonded under two autocratic regimes: the Rana Regime (1846-1950) and the Panchayat (1960-1990). In 1975, people resisted the autocracy of the Panchayat (Bhandari, 2012). At that time, community youths in urban Lalitpur united to establish the *Sahar ko school* and make people aware of their democratic rights. The youths' motive was to silently protest against the rulers through public awareness programs conducted peacefully. The second is the social cause. A community would feel pride in establishing schools in their place (Pande, 2003). There is also the societal perception that children must attain minimum schooling education to live better

⁴⁹ A cultural dancing and singing program in Tihar festival in Nepal

lives (Acharya, 2017). The third is the philanthropic values of people who selflessly promoted schooling education in their community. These three findings on the establishment of schools support that in Nepali society, "communities/societies are the places where the education systems evolve" (Dhungel et al., 2013, p. 31). I found this affirmative awareness by past generations has been passed on to the present context as a philanthropic value in Nepali school governance.

Communities' Present Involvement in School Governance

Unlike earlier generations, people do not need to establish schools as this is now the responsibility of the government. Instead, people take care of these schools by engaging in SMCs and PTAs. People help schools financially or morally, and this work is volunteer work. In urban public schools, locals who do not send their children to public schools are the Chairs and members of SMCs of these schools. The parents are mainly migrants who are economically deprived, and they do not engage in school management roles; as a result, affluent local people from society are in leadership positions in the SMCs. I found these locals to be politicians, ex-bureaucrats, retired army personnel, and local entrepreneurs who use their influence to enhance the learning environment, bring in funding, and take responsibility for construction activities. Mr Naya, the Head Teacher of the *Sahar ko school*, admitted, "Primarily, I look after academics. The SMC undertakes all the ongoing construction of our school buildings." School teachers are also satisfied with the roles of these (non-parent) locals because the school has been able to make progress in terms of infrastructure development and academic achievements. The Eighth Amendment of the 1971 Education Act in 2016 states that the Chair's position is open to any capable member of the SMC (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b), so this allows the socially and politically influential locals to lead the SMCs. I found that parents choose to include prominent persons in the SMCs because parents accept their inability in terms of social influence and economic support, to help the school management.

Parents hope influential locals can better contribute to schools by using their access to funding. This is an interesting finding from the perspective of people's participation in development work. The Eight Amendment of the 1971 Education Act of Nepal in 2016

mentioned that in a nine-member SMC team there has to be at least four parents (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b). This provision is based on the principle of participation theory of all stakeholders in school governance. Participation facilitates the uplift of voiceless people in the social structures to reach the ultimate decision-making authority, which positively impacts their lives (Arnstein, 1969). Participation of local stakeholders such as parents and communities in schools ensures good governance and better academic performance of children (Lewis & Pettersson, 2009). However, I found that parents do not wish to participate in school decision-making and that parents and school administration wish to have socially and politically influential people contribute to school governance. Most parents want to improve the management condition of their schools, but it is beyond their capability due to their poor economic situations. These parents are not concerned about self-empowerment and contribution to school governance, but they are concerned about bringing reform in the school through outside capable people.

I found poverty to be one of the causes for parents (mostly in urban public schools), which make their voices inferior and keep them engaged in earning activities to earn a living. Due to power imbalances in SMCs, poor migrant parents lack access to decision making. The SMCs are not inclusive by nature, as they comprise mostly male members. These SMCs show upward accountability to local governments, donors, and bureaucracy, and the voice of parents are often ignored. Poor parents have to accept all the SMC decisions without being critical, as they remain busy on earning their livings. These ongoing tensions persist in school communities with migrant lower socio-economic families not contributing to the school management.

7.1.1.2 Value of Togetherness: Binding Multiple Stakeholders in Schools

I found public schools collaborate with stakeholders, such as Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), donors, Education Officers, and Governments. These stakeholders, whom I call the outsiders, support larger funding, and prepare legislation for schools. Similarly, there are closed support teams for schools, whom I call insiders, such as SMCs, PTAs, teachers, parents, alumni, advisors, and child clubs that contribute to the school's management and governance functioning. I found there to be a cordial relationship between schools and communities. This togetherness between schools and their communities benefits school growth

and governance. Outsiders' support, insiders support, and reciprocal relationship between school and communities are discussed below.

The Outsiders' Support for Making Schools Resourceful

All of the schools in my study have coordinated with outsiders, such as NGOs and the government. NGOs help schools through providing scholarships and stationery to students, and International NGOs provide significant funding for constructing school buildings and other infrastructure. In the case of *Semi-Sahar ko school*, a Japanese NGO provided 70 million Nepali Rupees for the building construction. After the completion of the new building, the school aimed to upgrade its classes, increase the number of students, and provide modern pedagogical facilities to the students. Government agencies such as DLPIU have constructed new buildings to replace those damaged by the 2015 earthquake. Research (Barrett et al., 2019; Majhi & Mallick, 2019; Nasuna et al., 2021) shows the positive impacts of quality school infrastructures on increasing student enrolment. Local Governments, through their Education Officers, have the role of facilitating schools, communities, NGOs, and different tiers of government planning and mobilising educational budgets. All these stakeholders help the growth of public schools.

In Nepal, NGOs, donors, and government provide macro-level support to public schools. The Central Government allocates one-tenth of their annual budget to education, which although a considerable proportion of the budget is considered insufficient for education development. For instance, in the fiscal year 2020-21, per-student spending was 200 US dollars (United Nations Children's Fund, 2021b). A large portion of Nepal's educational budget is spent on current expenditure including daily administration, such as paying salaries of teachers and staff (National Campaign for Education Nepal, 2018). Limited budgets for schools is one of the hurdles confronting SMCs implementing school-related plans and policies (A. R. Bhattarai, 2022). Other elements of education, such as pedagogy, curriculum, governance, and management, are overlooked due to the limited budgets. The limited budgets negatively impact management and educational delivery, which leads to students having inferior modern-day skills. Schools lack sustainable financial resources, so they seek support from NGOs (Rajbhandari & Rajbhandari, 2016). During my research, Ms Chup, an elected representative in

Patan Metropolitan City, stated: “The government's budget is hard to receive because we must arrange several documents and follow harsh bureaucratic procedures”. The situation of low budgets and the tough bureaucratic processes that need to be undertaken before receiving government funds causes public schools to seek resources from NGOs. Outsider support is crucial to making public schools resourceful because these schools cannot sustain themselves through a standalone approach.

The Insiders’ Support for Strengthening School Management

I found that public schools have established good relations with insiders, primarily parents, locals, and teachers. The SMCs and PTAs are the legally acknowledged school committees mentioned in the 1971 Education Act and the 2001 Education Regulations of Nepal. These committees assist the schools in managing schools effectively, promoting quality teaching-learning activities, and exploring and properly utilising local resources. SMC members regularly conduct meetings and discuss the school's matters such as infrastructure, management improvement, and teaching quality. Parents and teachers are teamed up in a PTA, which bridges the gap between school and parents. Alumni network former students and gather funding to support the school. The Advisor Committee is comprised of locals with experience in management and administration work. Mr Dhyana, the Head Sir of the *Sahar ko school*, reflected, “When the community feels that the school belongs to them, they come to inspect and support the school activities even when the teachers are not in the school.” All these local stakeholders have important roles in school governance.

As mentioned above, insiders such as the SMC, PTA, teachers, parents, alumni, advisors, and child clubs, work to support and develop schools. Local stakeholders' roles are crucial to developing good school resources (A. R. Bhattarai, 2022). Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) look after the educational quality of schools and maintain the regular communication between teachers and parents (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2020). The PTA leads the social audit⁵⁰ in schools in the presence of locals, which helps to make the school management system accountable and trustworthy (The World Bank, 2012). Locals also have a role in managing the construction work

⁵⁰ Every public school in Nepal require to do social audit to make its financial transaction and school decisions transparent

in schools damaged by the 2015 earthquake (see Paudyal & Bhandary, 2022) as SMCs and PTAs have taken responsibility for construction activities. As a result, teachers can devote their time to teaching duties.

There are other examples to show how local ideas have contributed to making public schools resourceful. In the *Sahar ko school*, the SMC Chair, teachers, and local well-wishers deposit money into an endowment fund, and the fund is utilised to provide cash support to the students coming from poor households. In the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, the alumni association reconnects with the past students willing to support the school's development. Mr Party, an elected Ward representative in the Setidevi municipality, clarified, "The former students formed alumni because they have a close attachment with their school." As time goes by, former students will come to hold various prestigious positions locally, nationally, and globally. Their diverse experiences and funds can help in bringing reforms to infrastructure, team building, and student support. Formal education-related laws in Nepal do not recognise alumni in the governance structures (see Nepal Ministry of Education, 2019; Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b; Nepal Ministry of Law, 2020); however, I found alumni associations are important in resource mobilisation to schools. There are two guiding values that encourage Alumni. First is the cultural sentiment of former students to show respect to their past schools and teachers. These students value the principle of oneness to work together for their former school because social connectivity is a typical value in Eastern societies (Sapkota & Tharu, 2016). These students are highly grateful to their teachers because Gurus are highly respected in Hindu societies (Rigopoulos, 2018). Second is the social cause whereby former students want to reconnect and use their relationships to support their former schools by creating social capital (see Claridge, 2018). Alumni are a way to reunite former students and use their team strengths to mobilise resources for schools (Adhikari & Adhikari, 2021). However, alumni function as an informal school governance structure because education Acts have not explicitly provided guidelines or a working model for their operation.

School and Communities: Two-way Relations

The two-way collaboration between public schools and the community is essential to developing a sustainable relationship because a school is an element of a community. After the 1950s, communities established schools by donating land, giving money, and providing physical labour (Pradhan et al., 2019). At present, the schools are under the care of the government, but there is still a reciprocal relationship between schools and communities. Schools are oriented to producing qualified, competent, and morally-embedded human resources who will be able to contribute to knowledge-driven societies (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2021). Communities have trust in schools, which shape good futures for children. Further, the communities use school grounds etc for non-educational purposes, because other facilities are not available. As described in this study, the youths in Kalidevi Rural Municipality organised a volleyball competition at the playground of the *Gaau ko school*. The school supported the event by providing amenities such as tables, chairs, a sound system, electricity supply, water, and toilets. The youths, who were locals and students, praised the support of the school in administering the function. This event refreshed a cordial bonding between the school and the community. Mr Tall, a local teacher in the *Gaau ko school* described, “In this ground, our students perform regular sports activities and conduct morning prayer and assembly. The community uses this ground for playing and other social activities. This ground belongs to everyone.” A non-living object, 'the ground', which the school renovated for its students and opened to the community, connected school and community sentiments. I also have a sense of attachment with a public school in my settlement.

In Nepal, the government administers a nationwide vitamin A and deworming campaign for children under 5 in October and April. This program aims to reduce child mortality (Poudel, 2021, October 19). The programs are organised at the community level. In my locality, our Ward office conducts the program at a health centre and the Sahar ko school. In October 2021, my wife and I took my small daughter to the Sahar ko school to receive medicine. Although we have not enrolled our daughter at the school, the school does not differentiate between parents and non-parents to receive such services. I have a relationship with the school administration, and I help the school with fundraising activities.

My experience shows that communities still have cordial relations with public schools in Nepal. Parajuli (2007) viewed that modern schooling governance in Nepal, which was introduced

through SMCs, considers schools as elements of the government rather than parts of the community. However, I found that there exists a reciprocal relationship between schools and communities, which identifies schools as an element of community. Communities perform social, cultural, and health-related functions on the school's premises; in return, the community offers love, respect, and protection to schools.

In the discussions on the value of the togetherness of local school stakeholders, I noted that it is the school that should lead the relationship-building process with communities. The 2018 Act Relating to Compulsory and Free Education in Nepal has allowed public schools to receive grants from any person or institution upon receiving consent of their local governments (Government of Nepal, 2018). However, I noted that it is not an easy task for a school to mobilise the strength of local community people for the school's welfare especially in urban cities. In a school, the Head Teacher represents professional leadership and the SMC Chair represents political leadership (Ghimire, 2022). Referring to the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, I found that a capable Head Teacher can convince community people to come to the school and support them with their ideas and resources. The school has formed several committees such as SMC, PTA, Alumni, and Advisory Board to engage the maximum number of locals in the school development process. I noticed that a school administration can help to organise community programs by lending its buildings, grounds, and basic amenities. My research provides evidence that a school with an efficient team of the Head Teacher and SMC can bring more financial resources for constructing school buildings and engage communities for the school's benefit.

7.1.1.3 Religion and Education: A Nexus?

Nepali societies are influenced by Hindu dharma, as more than 80% of people follow this (Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). The cultural practices of Hinduism are observed in the schools in Nepal. In schools, where religious events such as the Saraswati Puja are performed, there are temples to the Goddess Saraswati, and students say morning prayers chanting Sanskrit mantras. I took part in the celebration of the Saraswati puja festival at the *Sahar ko school*, where I found the religious diversity of every child is acknowledged, as Nepal is

a secular country. I discuss my findings on Saraswoti puja, temples of Saraswoti, and religious diversity in schools in Nepal and relate these to local values in school governance.

The Saraswoti puja is a national festival in Nepal celebrated annually. Public schools celebrate the puja⁵¹ as an auspicious day. On this day, all teachers and students gather in schools and worship Saraswoti, the Hindu Goddess of Education. Locals and parents also come to the schools to worship the Goddess, seek blessings, and enrol their children. On this day, schools are prepared to have new enrolments as there is a religious belief that this day is auspicious to beginning the education of a child. In the *Sahar ko school*, teachers and students organised the Saraswoti puja day, during which they performed religious activities, such as praying to the Goddess, chanting the Hindu mantras, worshipping, and making and distributing prasad⁵². Teachers, staff, and students receive tika⁵³ and blessings from their Head Teachers. I could hear the Nepali teacher announcing on the mike, “Respected Guardians! You are most welcome [if you plan] to admit your children into our school.” Similarly, I saw the Ward Chair visiting the school to worship the Goddess and putting *tikas* on the forehead of teachers, whilst giving blessings. It is a usual practice to receive blessings from elders in Nepali societies.

There were other stories about this puja in the *Sahar ko school*. Many local parents came to the school to worship the goddess, but no one admitted their children; instead, they planned to enrol in them into private schools, not in free public schools. The government provides free education in public schools; however, parental preference is for private schools (Gandharba & Gaire, 2021). Similarly, some non-Hindu (Christian) students had attended the Puja but as observers, and these students did not take tika or eat prasad but sat silently in one corner and enjoying the event. I did not see any discriminatory practices by the teachers towards the children who followed religions other than Hinduism. The Puja event connected locals, teachers, and students because of its religious and educational value in Nepali society. Later in December, the school organised a Christmas celebration for its students. This celebration showed the school's attempt to create a religious harmony culture. However, a narrative by Mr Dada, a *Semi-Sahar ko* school teacher, was thoughtful in understanding the

⁵¹ Religious worship

⁵² Holy food that is made of sweet and fruits

⁵³ A colourful mark on the forehead usually red

dominance of a single religion in schools. He shared, “In the [morning] assembly, we ask students to do the Saraswoti bandana⁵⁴. The Christian students join hands but do not utter the Hindu mantra. When we ask for their silence, they reply that they are Christian.” This aspect of religious diversity must be acknowledged in school systems.

Almost all Nepali schools have the temple of the Goddess Saraswoti. In my research, I observed that most students and teachers have deep faith in the Goddess. Whenever any student or teacher passes by the Goddess's idol, they close their eyes, join hands, bow down, and pray for a while. Locals also come to the schools and worship. My participants believe that the presence of the Goddess in schools will stop evil happenings, create a positive learning environment, and make the school environment sacred and peaceful. Ms Chup, an elected representative in the Patan Metropolitan City, admitted, “Our belief system is [due to] our cultural foundation. Our social value is vital because we follow these supernatural things. Thus are our cultural legacies that are more worthy than materialistic development.” Mr Boss, the SMC Chair in the *Gaau ko school* compared the education situation in the developed nations and Nepal saying, “In the USA, people open fire in schools and colleges and kill hundreds of students. We call it a massacre. Our faith system towards God never encourages our children to be violent in schools.” It seems that the Goddess has created a kind of spiritual bonding among teachers, students, and locals and this bonding is harmonious and humane. Despite these, some of my participants perceive that the influence of the Hindu religion in public schools is politically guided. Mr Dada revealed that the Shah dynasty ruled in Nepal for 250 years until 2006, and the King from the dynasty was believed to be the reincarnation of the Hindu God Vishnu. These rulers always favoured the Hindu culture and values in Nepali communities. Due to this, all public schools were named after the Hindu Gods and Goddesses and had temples of Saraswoti. Additionally, there is a dominant voice that religious practices in schools should continue and not stop in the name of modernisation. I reflected that such Hindu traditions were an essential element in making Nepali society and schools harmonious.

Overall, Hinduism makes schools sacred places and binds schools with communities. The Saraswoti puja is performed annually in schools where gurus and students organise religious

⁵⁴ chanting.

functions. Students receive blessings from their gurus, and gurus have high prestige and are regarded as gods in Hindu society (Rigopoulos, 2018). Community people also participate in this religious program and worship the Goddess, strengthening the school-community relations. Apart from this, the schools organise the Saraswati puja day as the student's enrolment day. Every morning students and teachers gather in front of the Goddess to do morning prayers with deep humility and gratitude (Shrestha, 2022, June 21). Prayers by chanting mantras and meditation are the spiritual practices of humans that allow them to concentrate, and be peaceful and joyful (Sadhguru, 2016a). This kind of Hindu worship tends to make schools free from evil happenings. School and University massacres are common in advanced countries such as the USA, Canada, among others (Dumitriu, 2013; Paolini, 2015; Vera & Yan, 2022, November 16). It is difficult to envisage these in Nepali schools as we have not witnessed such violent school massacres yet. These examples show that Hinduism supports the peaceful and safe learning environment, which is a prerequisite to sound school governance.

7.1.1.4 Conservative Mindset of Locals

I found some conservative mindsets amongst locals who did not support the growth of schools and negatively influence school governance. These mindsets include social class divisions based upon managers and beneficiaries of schools, retaining the patriarchy in school management structures, and using strength by locals in getting benefits from schools.

Social Class Division in Schools

There are two classes of citizens involved in Nepali public schools: wealthy managers and poor students. The management positions of public schools are occupied by wealthy people who send their children to private schools. Only children from low-income families, mostly migrants, are enrolled in urban public schools. In the case of *Sahar ko school*, the SMC Chair is a retired bureaucrat who is wealthy and has high social prestige. None of his family members study at the *Sahar ko school*. It is good if the primary guardians are in the leading positions in the SMCs; however, I found that most of these parents are not interested in helping the school due to their weak social and economic capabilities. In addition, most students work as domestic help in rich people's houses. Mr Neel, a staff member at a foster home,

commented, “the caretaker parents feel that if they go to the school of their domestic workers, their social prestige will lower”. So, the rich people from communities fulfil the leadership positions in the schools. A general discourse, “a public school is for poor students and SMC positions for rich and affluent”, is perceived as granted by parents, teachers, and SMC members in the urban Lalitpur. Similarly, in the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, the enrolment of local students is diminishing while that of migrant students is increasing. Some children from so-called low caste groups in the community receive scholarships, which the government finances, from the school, and there is a provision of mid-day meals for up to fifth-grade students. The SMC Chair, Mr Neta, is a politically influential person who was nominated directly by the Setidevi Municipality.

Rich people prefer private schooling for their children because these schools provide better educational delivery and help learners develop their potential (Bhatta & Budathoki, 2013; Koirala, 2015b). Shrestha (2014) mentioned that there is a so-called "social stigma" in communities that private schools increase prestige (p. 4), while public schools are "poor man's schools" (p. 20). There is a growing negative perception towards public education in Nepal. Public schools are infamous for poor educational delivery, low pass rates, high dropout rates, and inefficient management (Koirala, 2015a; Nepal Ministry of Education, 2020b; Shrestha, 2014). The 2020 report by the Nepal Ministry of Education assessed the learning outcomes of Nepali students across the country who were studying in grade 10 in 2019. The report presented public school students' low performance compared to those of private schools (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2020b). Due to the difference in the quality of education between public and private schools, public schools are tagged as poor man's schools where the education is free and of low quality. It is also important to note that there is an enrolment of more than 80% of the students in the community and religious schools in Nepal (Nepal Ministry of Finance, 2022), and the Central Government annually allocates at least 10 per cent of its budget to finance public education (National Campaign For Education Nepal, 2021). This is a paradoxical situation in relation to Nepali education governance in which public education is free and the choice of most students. Still, public schools do not yield quality education outputs despite the government’s funding and ownership.

In the case of *Gaau ko school*, the elected Ward Chair is the SMC Chair. Parents and the community express their dissatisfaction with the political leadership in the SMC. They believe this provision politicises the school environment, and governing power will be centralised to the local governments, SMC Chair, and Head Sir. No voices of the PTA are heard in the school's decision-making because of the domination of the SMC. I noted that people reject political leadership in schools if the leaders have interests in power centralisation and are unable to win the trust of parents and communities.

Patriarchy in School Governance: SMC as a Gentlemen's Club

I recognised that groups and communities in Lalitpur practice patriarchy in school governance. In all the three schools in my research, the Head Teachers (Head Sirs), the SMC Chairs, and the Ward Chairs are all men. The PTA Chairs and the Education Officers in the *Semi-Sahar ko* and *Gaau ko schools* are men. In the *Sahar ko school*, the position of SMC Chair has been occupied by men since its establishment in 1974. The current SMC Chair of the school proudly shared, "In our [nine-membered] SMC, only three males are active. Females do not attend meetings and we have kept their names on the committee as a formality." The SMC has kept the names of women on its membership list as their inclusion is required to meet the government's criteria for gender inclusion. In Nepal, women representation is maintained at least 33 percent in public institutions (Sijapati, 2021). However, there is a dominant belief from parents that vocal males can work better for schools when dealing with government agencies and donors. Ms Chup, a female elected representative, shared a distressing narrative, "Males still perceive that we [females] know nothing". This scenario indicates that public school SMCs are turning into gentlemen's clubs.

Women are looked down upon when participating in SMCs and PTAs. Patriarchy is taken for granted in school governance roles in public schools in Nepal. However, in his research, Dhakal (2021) claimed that Nepali women have crossed the earlier stages of non-participation and tokenism in school governance, and they are now tending to reach the citizen power level. This means women are close to achieving decisive roles in school governance. At the macro level, a report by the Nepal Ministry of Women claims that the country has achieved significant

progress in the area of gender equality and women empowerment (Dhital et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, my findings suggest that women's representation in school governance is guided by a tokenistic approach, which means they are represented only symbolically. My findings align with Sijapati (2019) who noted that women are less represented in school structures because of social perceptions that women cannot perform managerial roles and responsibilities.

Local Supremacy in School Roles

In my experience, local supremacy is the misuse of authority by local stakeholders to obtain personal benefits from school resources and to influence a school's decisions to maintain local dominancy. I explored that groups and communities in Lalitpur believe local power brokers benefit by manipulating school management decisions. There are examples to show the misuse of school buildings by elected representatives. In the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, the Local Government has unnecessarily handed over one of the school's buildings to open a polytechnic institute resulting in fewer study rooms for students. The SMC stands by this action because of the power positioning of the local government is the highest amongst all to manage school education locally. The school's administration has no say in all these political decisions as it holds less power and political status than the SMC and the Local Government. The school construction work has been ongoing since the 2015 earthquake and has disturbed the teaching-learning process. The school is primarily engaged in school building works, whilst other education priorities such as providing quality teaching, sports facilities, and science and computer labs, and initiating modern pedagogical approaches are ignored. Parents and students perceive that the school's unilateral focus on construction work as a problem, but the SMC sees the school building work as progress. The SMC, which is dominated by influential and politicised locals, seems to be ignoring the problems of students and parents.

Another interesting finding about local supremacy is in the *Gau ko school*. Local teachers are grouped against the Head Sir who comes from a different geographical area of Nepal. There is no excellent and welcoming work environment for the new teachers who are not locals. The school building contractors do not obey the instruction of the Head Sir to

complete construction work as per the agreement made with the school. Indeed, the contractors, who are locals, seem to take no notice of the Head Sir. Unfortunately, the SMC stands by the contractors and has isolated the Head Sir. Similarly, the local teachers are primarily engaged in non-teaching activities like livestock rearing, vegetable farming, and dairy work, and thus are not productively and dedicatedly to working at schools. The Head Sir's involvement in administrative and management roles has increased his workload. The SMC Chair agreed that the Head Sir is under enormous work pressure. The Chair suggested, "I agree that the workload of a Head Sir has increased due to added responsibility of the school's management. Teaching and management works are two different aspects. I believe there needs to be a separate post for a school manager." Likewise, the Education Officers are ignored by the elected local government authorities. When allocating school budgets, the Local Government shows its dominant position and know-all attitude by not consulting the Education Office.

The findings related to local supremacy imply that local strength is observed in schools in order to exhibit power and control in school decisions. Some people want to control school administration, teachers, and staff and show off their power as locals. Power is associated with the "capacities of individuals to influence the collective decision-making process" in society (Pansardi, 2021, p. 310). However, this influence of locals is not helping sound school governance in Lalitpur. I found there are frustrations among teachers, Head Teachers, Education Officers, parents, and some locals regarding the misuse of local power in schools. The discussion that follows next is about the political influences on school governance.

7.1.2 Political Influence on School Governance

Political influence is inevitable in school governance because the power exercised amongst stakeholders helps bring policies, legislation, and funding to schools. Politics gives an individual or institution legitimate authority to provide service and justice to people (Cassinelli, 1961). In my research, the Education Officer of Patan Metropolitan City commented, "Politics is everywhere in education. It is more visible in the role performances of the SMCs", which signifies that politics is omnipresent. I understand politics is used as authority by school stakeholders to bring reforms which are beyond the control of local communities. In doing so,

party politics misuses local governments, SMCs, and teacher unions to accumulate local power. Politics has both positive and negative influences on school governance. I now discuss the findings as *politics for schools' growth* and *political control of schools*.

7.1.2.1 Politics for Schools' Growth

I begin the discussion on the positive influences of politics in schools with a statement by Mr Boss, SMC Chair of the *Semi-Sahar ko school*. He expressed, "Political people cannot remain passive in a community. We are accountable for every social and developmental activity inside this Ward." This zeal of contributing something better for a society brings political persons to work in schools. I found that the glamour of power exercise brings local stakeholders to engage in school management roles. Similarly, local governments show active roles in the preparation and implementation of local education Acts, local curricula, and response to the COVID pandemic to sustain school education. I discuss these findings as the glamour of power and local governance in schooling education.

The Glamour of Power in Bringing Locals to Schools

In public schools in Lalitpur, there exists a political glamour coming from the status of being the SMC Chair or a member of the SMC. SMCs represent local communities, parents, and Local Governments in schools, and SMC Chairs are influential in bringing in funds to schools, supporting administrative work, and responsibly managing the schools. The trend in locals becoming SMC members has increased their ownership towards public schools; they go to schools, coordinate with Head Teachers and teachers, and monitor and support ongoing school development works. These SMC members are vocal persons in society who have good connections to political parties, so teachers need not have to look after construction activities but can entirely focus on education outcomes.

Similarly, the SMCs have launched several innovative ideas to make schools financially sustainable, including leasing out unused land and renting spare rooms. The SMC members communicate with students and the Head Teachers to enhance student learning. These dialogues among managers, administrators, teachers, and students bring the stakeholders close to the schools' development. In the *Sahar ko school*, the SMC Chair is not engaged in party

politics; however, he exercises his political authority to provide the best service for the school and students.

Another interesting finding is from the *Semi-Sahar ko school*. The SMC Chair and his team successfully brought significant donor funding to construct a building. I witnessed the Chair meeting with donors on public holidays at his house. Due to the social and political status of the Chair, the teachers and school staff perform their duty diligently. Mr Neta, the SMC Chair shared, "It is easy for me to manage the teachers as I am an outsider, a political person, and a socially known one. I have contact with many people; thus, I can also bring school resources." I found that the government and donor agencies highly acknowledge and trust the Chair's position as a social worker and a renowned political leader in the region. The SMC Chair represented the CPN-Maoist party and was a candidate for Ward Chair in the 2017 Local election but was defeated. Additionally, during the COVID pandemic, the school was left untended for several months as teachers and staff could not travel to reach the school. The SMC Chair mobilised his local members to take care of the school. A parent and SMC member, Mr Mate, was engaged in painting the school building, making a water tank, and gardening work.

Based on the 2019 Local Education Act of Setidevi Municipality, the Local Government Office directly nominated the SMC Chair, and his nomination as the Chair shows his power nexus with the political parties, and I perceive that he is using the school as a platform to accumulate his political power and prepare himself for the next local election. In supporting the engagement of political persons in schools, some parents and teachers consider that the SMC should accommodate politically influential people who will help to bring budgets to schools. The SMC Chair seems to be able to mobilise local stakeholders for the development of the school. The Head Teacher, Mr Dhyana agreed, "Community is neither active nor passive. It depends on how the school mobilises and gets optimum benefit from communal strength." His views indicate that politics is also a power to mobilise community's strength and orient this for schools. Mr Bahun, the PTA Chair in the *Semi-Sahar ko school* acknowledged the role of the SMC Chair and shared, "Politically, the SMC Chair belongs to the current ruling party in Nepal. He uses his networks to bring funds to the school. Guardians do not come to school and show

any seriousness in their children's education." Parents are not concerned about who leads the SMC but want their children to receive a quality education in a better school environment.

In comparison, in the case of the *Gaau ko school*, the Ward Chair, Mr Boss, was appointed as the SMC Chair as per the provision of the 2019 Local Education Act of the Kalidevi Rural Municipality. He is confident that his roles in the school will help bring more funds and several donor-funded projects. He insists that the SMC should have experts and capable persons who can help the school in administrative management, construction works and bringing in resources. He believes, "If there is the engagement of only one stakeholder [such as parents], it looks like a chair standing with one leg." Mr Purano, a retired teacher, added, "If an apolitical person leads the SMC, they again have to rely upon the political persons to get a budget for school". These views suggest that political leadership is needed to bring in resources and develop schools by engaging multiple stakeholders.

I interpret three meanings from the above-mentioned narratives which show how politics can support a school's growth. First, the presence of wealthy persons and party cadres in the SMCs helps to bring managerial reforms to schools. The SMCs are the platform for local stakeholders to exercise their power and impact the school's management, administration, teachers, and teaching-learning activities (Pherali, 2012). The public school lands and assets belong to the government, which manages teachers and their salaries and bares daily administration costs (Government of Nepal, 2018). As delegated by the Seventh Amendment of the 1971 Education Act in 2001, the SMCs are a legitimate platform to operate, care for, and manage public schools in the country (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b). This authority of the SMCs attracts local power brokers to schools. Second, the political parties have used schools as power centres for the political grooming of their leaders, so the post of the SMC Chair seems to be a lucrative position for those who aspire to political leadership. This attraction is because a broad social network and prestige can be developed by interacting with parents, locals, and teachers. Public schools have become a platform to develop local leaders who could contribute to the development of the entire locality. This local development activity will support the growth of schools as well. Third, schools also facilitate the entry of politically influential persons into SMCs. A school's progress is based on donations, which are more likely if the SMCs have

good political connectivity (Rajbhandari, 2016). It is also true that public schools in Nepal face a resource crunch due to smaller budget allocations in the education sector by the Central Government (United Nations Children's Fund, 2021b). These schools primarily depend on Government and donor support and do not use innovative ideas to explore alternative income sources (Sharma et al., 2015). However, it is ironic that the funding from donors to schools originates from different hierarchies of the Central Government, such as the National Planning Commission, and Central Education and Finance Ministries (Dahal, 2021). The Seven Provinces and 753 Local Governments rely on the Central Government to receive foreign aid and grants in Nepal (Nepal Ministry of Finance, 2017). Due to the involvement of different tiers of government in budget planning, a school can receive considerably more funding if its stakeholders have political influence. This process of fund-reception compels schools to maintain relationships with party leaders and have party representatives in the SMCs.

Local Governance in Schooling Education: Legislations to Leadership

Nepali politics supports local educational governance, as mentioned in the 2015 Constitution (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2015). I found that local Governments prepare and implement local education acts, create local schooling curricula, and played a key role in sustaining schooling education during the COVID pandemic. These governments also assist the Central Government in sorting out the issues related to the unbalanced deployment of teachers across the country. Local governments are perceived as the catalysts for developing school education.

In my research, all three Local Governments have prepared and implemented their local education Acts. These acts delineate the rights, roles and responsibilities of the Local Governments, Education office, SMCs, and Head Teachers in relation to educational development. These acts set guidelines for forming the SMCs, their work responsibilities and preparation of local curricula. The Local Governments bridge the gap between schools and the Central and Provincial governments and bring financial resources to the schools. Local Governments have a five-year mandate and can work dedicatedly for school improvement. The role of these governments in education is a new practice in the context of Nepal.

As stated previously, in the *Gaau ko school*, the elected Ward Chair is the SMC Chair. This provision has been implemented as per the 2019 Local Education Act of the Kalidevi Rural Municipality. In relation to this, the SMC/Ward Chair shared, "It is a common practice in Nepal that elected bodies to hold various executive positions in public organisations. Elected representatives can implement [their] policy and vision to serve the people". However, there is a critical view that every Local Government has its education activities in a situation where the country has no new central education act after the promulgation of the 2015 Constitution (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2021). Without reference to a central education act, local governments may have ideas for educational development that might not align with the national vision. Central Government delay in developing educational policies in time has hampered Local Governments and communities in developing education, which Gandharba and Gaire (2021) perceived as a policy paradox in Nepali education. Overall, the Local Government's political authority over schooling education increases their responsibility towards the people.

Similarly, I found that Local Governments prioritise making and implementing local curricula. The provision for the local curriculum is mentioned in the 2019 Nepal National Curriculum Framework (Nepal Curriculum Development Center, 2019). School stakeholders are excited to transfer indigenous skills to the new generation, promote local culture and tourist destinations, and enrich local identities through the local curricula. This research shows that Setidevi Municipality has endorsed local schooling curricula in all schools. The curriculum includes such content as indigenous cloth-making skills, popular tourist sites, and local religious heritage. Mr Curri, the Education Officer of Setidevi Municipality, added, "The national curriculums see everything at the macro level, such as the moon, universe, and oceans. Local curriculums were developed to teach the new generations about local places, people, history, cultures, festivals, and skills." In some schools, where there are no local curricula, parents expect their Local Governments to prepare these. For instance, I found that the residents at *Khaldo Bazaar* in Kalidevi Rural Municipality are endowed with indigenous technologies and skills such as handicrafts, livestock raising, dairying, commercial vegetable production, and herb farming. These skills are difficult to pass on to new generations as there is a trend that young

people leave villages for cities to find jobs and study. The local schooling curriculum can help these rural young realise local identities and potentialities.

The contextualisation of the curriculum is essential for connecting student societal practice and knowledge systems to the formal schooling process (Rajbanshi et al., 2021). These curricula represent their voices, identity, geography, indigenous skill, and narratives of their lives, which will be transferred to the new generations (Gurung & Parajuli, 2021). Local Governments have the right to govern the curricula-making processes. This role of the government is essential because the curriculum and medium of teaching in schools align with local culture and necessity. Further, these curricula have to be prepared by participating teachers, locals, and experts (Aryal, 2022). Meanwhile, there is a political reason for the delay in preparing this curriculum in villages. In the case of the *Gaau ko school*, the rural Education Officers are yet to receive training for making such curricula.

The COVID-pandemic has been a horrific period in the history of Nepali education. The schools in Nepal were physically shut down in March 2020, and most of these adopted alternative teaching methods (United Nations Children's Fund, 2021a). Local Governments led in sustaining schooling education during this pandemic (Dhungana et al., 2020), and these governments were very much concerned about students' health and safety and their learning losses. They communicated well with the schools and instructed them to continue teaching by applying alternative methods, such as online teaching. These governments provided teachers with information technology and leadership training to help with educational delivery. During the pandemic period, local Governments and schools were at the forefront of following the Central Government's advice and helping children to continue their education. Otherwise, there could be an enormous dropout of young people due to the prolonged school closures (Dawadi et al., 2020). After the COVID pandemic abated, havoc was reduced in the country, and the Central Government issued the COVID-Related School Opening Guidelines in November 2020. These guidelines authorised the Local Governments to reopen the schools depending upon COVID's impacts in the local contexts (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2020a). In this study, all three local governments communicated well with the Central Government and schools. These local governments asked schools to arrange meetings with local stakeholders such as parents,

communities, child clubs, political parties, and journalists to seek the best ideas for school reopening after the COVID pandemic. Mr Dhyana, the Head Teacher at the *Semi-Sahar ko school* remarked, “The Setidevi Municipality office sought views from all the schools to resume physical classes. We all advised that schools can be resumed by adopting the necessary health safety measures.” Similar to the claim of Karki (2020) about the COVID pandemic and its opportunities for Local Governments, the clear guidelines from the Central Government helped Local Governments to actively and effectively engage in school education. The pandemic became a catalyst for developing inter-governmental relationships among all tiers of government in the country (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2021), including in education reform.

There are other reforms due to local governance in schooling education. Local Governments bear direct accountability towards their citizens, so they are very cautious if any donors come to support the schools. This alertness is because they worry that the donor's project should not bring harm to the beneficiaries. Mr Party, an elected Ward representative in the Setidevi Municipality commented, “The Ward Office should be aware of the ongoing developments in its vicinity. Ward Office is liable to every concern of people”. Similarly, these governments also assist the Central Government in managing the deployment of teachers as per the 2016 Teachers Redeployment Plan. In Nepal, public school teachers dislike working in the Terai and remote hilly regions because of climatic conditions and the lack of facilities. Most of the teachers employ their political support and enjoy the privilege of working in cities, so there is an unbalanced deployment of teachers across the country, which is one of the problems in Nepali education (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016b, 2016c). It is now the responsibility of the local governments to identify extra teachers and send details to the Central Government. Apart from this, teachers feel that the presence of the Local Governments in their villages helps them to get timely educational notices from the Central Government. Mr Hotel, a teacher in the *Gaau ko school* expressed, “We receive our salary on time. Kalidevi Rural Municipality circulates every notice to all schools”. Based on the needs of the schools, the Local Government provides an annual budget. The vigilance of these governments on school activities, such as construction and teaching learning, has increased in recent times due to the

close physical proximity to schools. The political power exercised by the Local Governments helps build the school management system. These changes due to local government roles support that the "education system themselves are part of the political process" (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2021, p. 125).

I have explored some positive narratives on politics as a collaborative agency in school governance. However, there is a dominant understanding in Nepali education, "Politics has done more harm than good to the Nepalese school education system" (Dhungana, 2012, p. 4). Scholars claim that party politics have ruined educational quality, school management, teachers' professional growth, teachers' recruitment and mobilisation, and delayed the making of essential educational legislation (see Dharel et al., 2013; Dhungana et al., 2021; Ghimire, 2021, February 7; Khanal & Ghimire, 2022; Khanal, 2010; Kharel, 2017; Neupane et al., 2018; Pherali, 2012; Poudyal, 2015; Sharma, 2008; United Nations Children's Fund, 2017). To these scholarly discussions, my findings add some positives about the role of politics in school governance. I explored politics in schools in bringing efficient persons to the management team, developing local leadership, and making schools resourceful with local efforts. Local governance in education was brought by a political agreement between parties through the 2015 Constitution. The local governments have acted as catalysts for education development through the activities of creating local education Acts and local schooling curricula, taking leadership to sustain school education and well-being of students during the COVID pandemic, managing teachers and their deployment, and initiating swift administrative processes. I now explore some other narratives concerning the harmful effects of politics in school governance.

7.1.2.2 Political Control in Schools

Politics has harmful effects on sound school governance when school stakeholders misuse political authority while performing governance roles. Party politics is dominant in the formation of Local Governments, SMCs, and teachers' unions. I found politics was responsible for increasing schools' dependency on donors, which widens school-community relations. The following discussion follows the negative influences of politics in school governance.

Local Governments: Centralising School Powers

Local Governments are at the centre of political power as elected people from different political parties represent these governments. In the three study schools, the local education Acts prepared by these governments mentioned that the Local governments would have the final say on who would lead the SMCs. In the *Sahar ko school*, teachers are dissatisfied with the new education Act that states that the elected Ward representative will be the SMC Chair. There are worries that these representatives might busy themselves with community development work and not give sufficient time to the school. Ward representatives are members of political parties and can influence their party's interests in schools. Ms Nitu, the Deputy Head Teacher at the school suspected “the dominant priority of the Ward representatives is local development work and service to people. If they become the Chair of all the public schools in the Ward, it will be difficult for them to focus on other works.”

In the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, the Local Government directly controls the school's decisions. As indicated previously, the SMC provided one school building to the Local Government to operate a Polytechnic institute. As a result, students did not have sufficient rooms to study, and the school asked the students to come to the school in the morning and during day shifts. The school cited the cause of the two shifts was COVID's impact, but the primary reason was the reduced number of study rooms due to the powerful influence of the Local Government. The SMC Chair of the school was directly nominated by the municipality as he belonged to the political party of the municipal's Mayor. The SMC Chair showed accountability towards the Local Governments who recruited him instead of acting to the benefit of parents and students.

In the *Gaaau ko school*, the Ward Chair leads the SMC. The SMC Chair's children study in the nearby private school, and he was not serious about solving the issues of the *Gaaau ko school* related to infrastructure, management, and education delivery. The SMC did not support the Head Sir, who shared, “I alone have to take stress on all these [school constructions, administration, and management] works and equally focus on the academic.” Similarly, the Local Government bypassed the Education Office while making educational plans and allocating budgets. The Education Officer lacks the financial and administrative authority to do

bureaucratic management of education; the authority lies with the Chief Executive Officer of the Local Government who do not wish to delegate power to the Education Officer (Dhungana et al., 2021). These Chief Executive Officers, already lower in the power hierarchy than the Mayors and Deputy mayors of the local governments, do not wish to have less power. This scenario in the context of *Gaau ko school* suggests that politics has centralised the Local Government at the core of school governance.

As discussed above, the Local Governments are perceived as being a negative in the politics of school education. These governments are formed through periodic elections and have terms of five years. The elected representatives are the cadres of the political parties (Acharya & Scott, 2022) and they introduce party politics into schools with respect to resource allocation, school management, and teachers' mobilisation and transfer (Dhungana et al., 2021). These governments recruit their political cadres as teachers and SMC members. Parent of students and community people understand that these local governments represent political figures who only intend to exercise power but have no intention to develop education. Local Governments are blamed for misusing school budgets and ignore the delivery of quality education. Likewise, the workload of Head Teachers is increased because schools are not getting collaborators but instructors only. This evidence suggests that public schools have risen to be the core of exercising political powers in Nepali communities (Hamal, 2020). Unfortunately, these exercises of power have neglected the achievement of quality education. Local Government representatives seek power in the SMCs to control the school administration and teachers and want to have decisive roles in the use of school resources. In the power influences of the Local Governments, the local people are always placed in a corner. As mentioned earlier, the Local Government's jurisdiction in school education is a new practice in Nepal introduced through the 2015 Constitution. I found that these governments intend to accumulate school-related power by ignoring community expectations. This approach of Local Governments poses the risk of widening the gap between the locals and schools.

To explain the power accumulation by Local Government, I refer a case to the Kalidevi Rural municipality, which has 28 schools. The 2019 Local Education Act of the Municipality mentioned that the SMC Chair should be selected from the Ward Chair, Ward Committee

members, parents, or educationalists. The right to select the SMC Chair remains with the Ward Committee, and the committee must consult the Rural Municipality office before the nomination. This provision of the Rural Municipality contradicts the Eighth Amendment of the 1971 Education Act made in 2016, which states that the SMC members will select the SMC Chair and that SMC members should be predominantly parents and persons in the community (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b). Local governments do not consider the national Education Act and wish to directly control the schools through the SMCs.

Similarly, there are work-related frustrations in the Education Office. Mr Paschim, the Education Officer pointed out, "Everyone seeks quality output [in schooling education] from me. We cannot interfere with the planning of local budgets as the Executive of the Rural Municipality does this. After the budget is finalised, they ask us to implement it without question." Overall, the roles of local governments signal that they have centralised educational power to themselves and have dictated the authority of local stakeholders, which I interpret as the negative influence of political authority.

School Management Committees: Cadres of Political Parties?

SMCs are the political power centres in Nepal's public schools (Pherali, 2012). The SMC Chairs primarily represent political parties, and in schools they want to expand their connectivity and social recognition (Rajbhandari, 2016; Rajbhandari & Rajbhandari, 2016). The SMCs network with Local Government officials, donors, parents, and communities around school issues. Due to this power positioning, SMC members can control the school Head Teacher and teachers, and influence the final decisions in school meetings.

In my research, there are interesting findings regarding SMCs. I have already discussed the context of SMC formation in the Patan Metropolitan schools, which have the SMCs led by the Ward Chair or any of the Ward Committee Members. In the case of the Kalidevi Rural municipality, the final authority to select the SMC Chair rests with the Rural Municipality Office. I found there the political nomination of the SMC Chairs, who are non-parents and aim to conduct politics in the name of social service. They develop a quota system to send their loyal cadres to the SMCs. Mr Purano, a retired teacher in the *Gaau ko school*, revealed, "During the

formation of SMC, the members are pre-determined by political parties. Political parties send their member representatives according to the quota they bear through a tacit understanding.” These political cadres bring conflict to school while making school decisions which will create chaos in the sound performance of school governance. On the other hand, the elected representatives perceived that it is their right to claim the SMC Chair position because of the mandate they received from the local election. There are tensions regarding the power roles between the local governments, locals, and teachers. Indeed, there are dominant views from some locals, Education Officers, and teachers that party-based political roles of the SMCs have brought disorder in schools.

Similarly, in the schools in the Setidevi municipality, there is a selection team, comprised of the Head Teacher, Education Officer and Ward Chair, to recommend the SMC Chair. This team recommends the name list of three potential persons for the SMC Chair. Afterwards, the Municipality Office selects the SMC Chair. The local communities view that the SMC members nominated through this process are already biased due to their partisan ideologies and cannot make fair contributions to schools. Locals who do not like to engulf themselves in party politics keep away from the school meetings. Mr Ghar, a local to the *Semi-Sahar ko school* claimed, “the Municipality nominates SMC members through the political channel. Earlier, there was a system that needed only parents in SMC, which later was dissolved. This resulted in the politicisation of the school environment.” This scenario in the schools in Lalitpur supports the claim of Khanal (2013b), who stated that “the policy has created legitimate spaces for community participation in school, participation in such spaces is taking a form of tokenism, and the community represented in school governance is restricted to a small number of political elites” (p. 235). In the name of parties, there is a political capture through the SMCs of public schools.

Teachers’ Union: Lobbying Agendas of Political Parties?

The political identity of a teacher is one of the most debatable issues in Nepal. Political parties in Nepal have instituted teacher unions in every public school. In the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, the Head Teacher and teachers belong to different political trade unions. There is a tacit understanding that teachers will do party politics, but this does not hamper teaching-learning

activities in the school. The Head Teacher at the school shared a thoughtful view, "A public school Head Sir is responsible not only for academic improvements but also seeking a budget for the school's development". This view shows how these Head Teachers deviate from their professional roles and engage in exercising power to make their school resourceful. In the *Gaau ko school*, I found teachers primarily busy with political work; teachers want to be union members because an apolitical identity cannot help them work diligently in schools. They receive unprofessional threats of transfer and oppression by the school's administration and seniors, which compels them to take up union membership. Mr Purano, a retired teacher at the *Gaau ko school* confirmed, "These political unions of teachers are networked across the country. After getting membership in any of these unions, the teacher will automatically gain a political identity." Some teachers even used their political nexus to get transferred to city schools and have privileged lives. Parents perceive that these political identities will engage teachers in non-teaching activities, which is not desirable for the future of their children. Mr Khawa, a parent in the *Gaau ko school* emphasised, "I believe that teachers should be apolitical, and they should not be engaged in any profitable business. If they are engaged in such things, their mind will be diverted from delivering quality teaching". There are two issues regarding the political engagement of teachers in schools.

First is the lack of clarity and misinterpretation of the rights and roles of the teacher unions. These unions are engulfed in the agendas of their mother parties instead of performing their professional roles (Dharel et al., 2013). Political parties consider teachers as capable cadres at the grassroots level because teachers can easily influence parents and control local politics. Due to power centralisation with the political parties, teachers build connections with them for professional security and growth. Khanal and Ghimire (2022) informed that the Head Teachers in Nepal face role conflict and role ambiguity problems. Role conflict is due to their limited power roles in school decision-making, although they are the administrative heads. Role ambiguity is due to their weak administrative and leadership development as they do not receive managerial training and may lack leadership skills. This makes the teaching profession vulnerable, and teachers can fall prey to the political parties in Nepal. Teachers rely on these parties for their transfer, promotion, and bringing funding to the schools. These power roles

make teachers more loyal to the parties, and they may forget their professional duties which they must perform as a teacher. I found that these teachers are under adverse pressure from party representatives who represent the schools as SMC Chairs and members.

Consequently, Nepali political parties cleverly use teachers and their unions to conduct active politics in schools and communities. These activities have shadowed the teachers' professional growth and transformed their respectable identities. Culturally, teachers are revered as similar to gods in Hindu societies (Rigopoulos, 2018). However, Khadka and Bhattarai (2021) mentioned that "with the neo-liberal economy, a person's greed of the Head Teachers for power, property, and prestige prevail" (p. 11). Politics is undermining teachers' professional and cultural identities, and there is a worry about the degradation of educational quality in schools. I present an example of how Nepali leaders perceive teachers' political engagement: a press meeting with a Chair of CPN-Maoist of Nepal, Mr Prachanda, in Kathmandu in November 2021. During the press meeting, a journalist questioned: Should teachers be involved in politics or not? Prachanda replied:

This query has been emerging as a legal question in Nepal. The issue of teachers' engagement in politics is viewed through the legal and constitutional lens, which should not be. In Nepal, all the political parties have survived and been institutionalised due to the contribution of teachers. In rural villages, teachers work closely with peasant' groups and farmers. These teachers keep the vision of political parties alive and functional. If we stop teachers from doing politics, it will make the party system weak. Teachers must engage more actively in social work and socio-political transformation tasks. Only through their engagement can we achieve social and political change in our country—Technically (legally), what has to be not a matter of discussion. Our party will make a policy to favour teachers to engage them for people's welfare.

(November 23, 2021: Mr Prachanda)

Mr Prachanda was Nepal's supreme Maoist commander in the 1996-2006 civil war. The Maoist revolution is credited with bringing changes to the country to make it a federal, democratic, and republican nation. Through the 2006 peace process, the Maoist party came into mainstream politics that acknowledged multiparty democracy. The Minister of Education in 2022 belongs to the same party. This view by Prachanda came some days before the party's five-year gathering in December 2021 in Kathmandu. Prachanda unveiled his party's lens toward teachers' engagement in active politics, and this view provides a glimpse of how political parties consider teachers as capable cadres.

Second is the education-related policy dilemma about teachers' unions. An amendment to the 1971 Education Act stated that there will be a representative teacher union, namely the Confederation of Nepalese Teachers, which shall work for their professional security and rights. The teachers are not allowed to take executive positions in the political parties, and if found they will be removed from their responsibilities (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b). This Act does not restrict teachers from taking general party memberships. The 2002 Education Regulation mentioned that teachers can form trade unions, but they need approval from the Nepal Ministry of Education (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2020). Teachers openly enrol in party-affiliated trade unions, and the Ministry allows these unions to be registered. This provision in the education Act allows the teachers to take general party memberships and to have separate party-based unions. In Nepal, every political party has its own teacher union; Nepal Teachers Association represents the Nepali Congress Party, Nepal National Teacher Association is associated with the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leftists, and All Nepal Teacher Associations represent the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist. These associations represent sister wings of their political parties (Sangroula, 2021, December 6). Union membership means that a teacher joining a teacher union becomes a party cadre by default. Education-related legislative provisions in Nepal favour a teacher union as a sister wing of a political party.

Politics Fuelling the School's Dependency on Donors

The political leaders in schools, such as SMC Chairs and Local Government representatives, are influential in making public schools resourceful by exploring budgets. I found that aid support is top-down, whereby the schools and communities have no say on these. More importantly, political facilitation of bringing outside funding is making schools dependent on donors and the Government, resulting in widened school-community relations.

In the case of the *Sahar ko school*, the SMC's political connectivity helped bring in funding for three school buildings from the Government. However, the school has no say in the design and colour of the buildings. The school cannot even alter the room sizes and construct toilets inside the building. In this regard, Mr Social, a teacher in the *Sahar ko school*, criticised "If we dare to change the building map, we will have to give up the project." This is an example of the top-down influence of donors to schools in Nepal.

In the context of the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, the community established the school in the 1950s. At present, there is less community involvement in the school for two reasons. Firstly, the community gradually stopped sending their children to school and preferred private schooling. Secondly, the community could not afford the growing unaffordable necessities of the schools, such as big infrastructure, sufficient numbers of teachers, and modern teaching and learning resources. These interventions need ample funding and are only possible through the help of big donors and governments. Currently, a school building at the cost of 70 million Nepali Rupees is being built with the support of a Japanese agency. The SMC members and the school administrations used their networks and influence to receive such a big budget for the school. The SMC team has less concern with community resources, which are usually labour contributions and small cash support. Mr Neta, the SMC Chair of the *Semi-Sahar ko school* expressed, “There is one community forest in the name of the school. The school sells wood and gets some income. However, I do not look at these small things because I focus on big things that bring visible changes in the school.” I found local communities are not interested in overseeing the school's big construction activities. Some locals perceive that politicians bring big budgets for such construction and are involved in corruption to benefit themselves. A local tea-shop owner stated, “The school environment is entirely political. Ill-minded people have only intended to do corruption there. They make several rules that legitimise their entry into the SMC. These people are always engaged in school construction works to get personal benefits”. Mr Ghar, whose house is next to the school added, “Only construction works are seen in the school. I do not know who is helping with these. I also wonder if the students can read in this disturbed environment.” The school does not consult with local communities about the donor's funding and implementing the new building project.

In the case of the *Gaau ko school*, the villagers carried all construction materials from nearby cities to construct the building in the 1970s. At that time, the support of the Government and NGOs was significantly less for the schools. The teachers and students jointly organised several cultural programs to raise funds for the school. Now, the scene at the rural settlement is entirely different as the *Gaau ko school* has sought rich donors for its infrastructure development. In 2014, its older building was reconstructed by the Indian

Embassy of Nepal. After the 2015 Earthquake, the DLPIU provided more than 14 million Nepali Rupees to construct two school buildings and toilets. People do not need to carry the construction materials as an excellent road connects the village with the nearby city. The Government provides sufficient teachers to the school and pays their salaries. So, schools get overwhelming support from donors and governments, and the political exercise of the SMCs is essential to bring such funding. However, this trend has shrunk the community's role in helping schools as it is beyond the capacity of locals to gather such significant financing. Mr Hotel, a local teacher at the *Gaa ko school* shared, "The community's support for schools has reduced in recent years. They need not have to give any monetary support to schools, instead, people knock on the doors of political party leaders to receive [external] funding for the school." Even the local government has framed its education Act to specify that the elected representatives would Chair the SMCs. These courses of action potentially reduce the community's involvement in schools.

In these three schools, politics is decisive in bringing in considerable funding, which is praiseworthy. However, the political exercise to get donors' money is widening the school-community relations and increasing schools' dependency on donors. The management and operation of schools were community responsibilities before and during the 1970s in Nepal (Dhungel et al., 2013; Pradhan et al., 2019). In 1971, the government centralised all schools and took control, which gradually made schools dependent on the government. Currently, a public school is not self-sustaining as it depends on Government grants (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2018), and now there are debates about the Government allocating less funds to school education (United Nations Children's Fund, 2021b). Most of this budget is used for non-academic activities such as paying salaries and administration costs (National Campaign for Education Nepal, 2018), so schools face challenges such as poor infrastructure, lack of modern educational facilities, insufficient teachers, and poor curriculum delivery (National Planning Commission, 2019). Regarding school infrastructure, there is a dominant understanding that safe school buildings will contribute to good academic achievement as this ensures a safe learning environment (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016b). The 2015 earthquake damaged over 7000 schools in Nepal, and this havoc was responsible for the learning loss of thousands of students over a long

period (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2021). In this educational context, communities cannot provide the immense financial support needed by schools, which makes schools rely upon donors or the Government.

The increased dependency of schools on international donors and governments looks likely to continue for some time. However, the questions are about the sustainable operation of schools, increasing dependency on donors, and widening school-community relations. Schools develop their political network through the SMCs and can receive such funding to make school buildings. This activity makes schools closer to donors and distant from the small-scale support of communities. In the *Semi-Sahar ko school*, the local community does not own the school building work that the donors fund. The SMC team is comprised of party representatives, and it solely implements the building project without the community's consultation.

In earlier research, scholars' mentioned Nepal's education system is largely donor-dependent, donors influence top-down educational policy-making, and they prescribe different models of education development, such as the SMCs (Bhatta, 2011; Dahal, 2021; Dhakal, 2019; Maudslay, 2014; Parajuli, 2007; Regmi, 2015, 2021a). My research has no objection to these scholarly claims. I consider that the exercise of political power is the core factor in bringing funds from donors to schools. However, politics has failed to act as a bridge between the school, donors, and the community. It is unable to acknowledge the value of community which is a durable support mechanism for a school. As a result, the politics exercised to receive funding is distancing communities from schools.

Overall, my findings on politics have defined a deeper understanding of its negative influence on school governance. Although there is literature to list the negative roles of politics in schools (see Dharel et al., 2013; Dhungana et al., 2021; Ghimire, 2021, February 7; Khanal & Ghimire, 2022; Khanal, 2010; Kharel, 2017; Neupane et al., 2018; Pherali, 2012; Poudyal, 2015; Sharma, 2008; United Nations Children's Fund, 2017), the negative influence of Local Governments has received limited comment. This limited discussion is because local government in Nepal is a new concept developed after the development of the 2015 Constitution. I found that local governments are centralising school-related power to themselves through local education Acts. This activity of local governments brings work-related

frustrations to Head Teachers, Education Officers, and teachers. Locals keep away from schools as they do not wish to engage in the power exercise of the local governments. Similarly, I found that SMCs are captured by the cadres of political parties and as a result, community and parental participation in schools has become weak. The teacher unions are deviated from their professional roles of focusing teacher growth and security. These unions represent the wings of political parties and lobby party agendas and ideologies. Distressingly, politics has been unable to create bond between schools, communities and donors, and schools are closely bonded to donors but distant from the communities. The discussion that follows next is a theoretical interpretation of the meanings on school governance that I developed in Step One.

7.2 Step Two: Theorisation of the Findings

Part Two of this chapter presents the theorisation of the narrative findings of my research. I use Localism-Eastern philosophy theory to make meaning of people's social and cultural values in school governance. I use New Public Management-Global governance theorising in analysing the political influences in school governance. I draw on these theories from the conceptual framework of my research (see Chapter Three).

7.2.1 Localism-Eastern Philosophy Perspectives on School Governance

People's local values in school governance, such as philanthropic roles, togetherness, and Hindu values, align with Localism-Eastern Philosophy theory. In my study, localism involves people managing the schools and helping in their sustainable operations. Eastern Philosophy /Hinduism builds and strengthens people's values to manage their personal and social lives in Nepali society. In relation to theory, I discuss community legacy, belongingness, Hinduism, and orthodox values.

7.2.1.1 Community Legacy in School Governance

Past Nepali societies established schools and promoted education, and I have explored three reasons behind the intentions of past generations to establish and develop schools in Nepali society. They were a political revolt against the Panchayat regime, attempts to develop status, and philanthropic motives. Political revolt and developing status represent the social dimension, whereas philanthropic motives represent cultural foundations.

The social dimension of the community's representation in a school is described by localism theory, which entails a bottom-up approach to people's development and self-governance (Chaudhary, 2019). In Nepali society, community effort to establish schools was also essential due to the low presence of the state at the community level, and education was not the priority of the autocratic Ranas and Panchayat (Bhatta & Mehendale, 2019; Pradhan et al., 2019; Shrestha, 2003). People were united to build schools at their places through mutual effort. Localism is a noble idea to empower, represent, and have locals participate in the development works that shape their lives (Painter et al., 2011). This ethos of locals still exists as a community value in the governance of Nepali public schools.

However, communities do not exist as absolutes; they are shaped by norms, values, and culture (Williams, 2004). Locals are integrated by their culture, which has developed from religions, knowledge, and societal interactions (Siwakoti & Adhikari, 2018). These domains of locals give rise to their knowledge systems and identity, which they use to manage their lives. Hinduism is an integral element in Nepali society, and the cultural values of Hinduism give high respect to education (Swarup, 1971). Education is the only path that can liberate human miseries, which is translated from a Sanskrit verse "*sa vidya ya vimuktaye*" (Mukherjee, 2015, p. 400). Education endows an individual with knowledge, which leads their journey of spiritual transcendence from worldly untruth to truth, darkness to light, and death to immortality (Spoon, 2010). This belief causes people to praise and promote schools in Nepali society. As a part of their dharma and at their own expense, locals constructed school infrastructure (such as a water tank), donated land, and contributed labour and finance to construct school buildings, which they understand. People opened schools as a part of charitable service to others (Timilsina, 2016). Doing dharma and karma is a way of living in Nepali society. Dharma is the proper conduct by a human, following the universal law of nature (Goenka, 2000; Mishra & Tripathi, 2020), and in Hinduism, Karma inspires people to work selflessly for others without having any personal expectations in return (Chakraborty, 2014). People supported public school management without having greed or personal benefit, and this support gradually developed as their culture of care value was passed on to the succeeding generations. These moral and selfless human actions relate to a spiritual transcendence of an individual to attain moksha in

Hinduism (Mishra, 2013). Moksha is the liberated stage of humans from worldly sorrow and suffering (Rajandran, 2017).

In the present educational context, people have adopted philanthropic values by engaging in school management committees. Affluent people from society who are non-parents work to reform the management of schools, and locals' involvement in schools helps to explore and mobilise local funding. They facilitate work division amongst school stakeholders, bring different infrastructure development projects, and provide moral support to the teachers and staff. Localism advocates collaborative ideas between all stakeholders to contribute to society's development (Kurland et al., 2012; Mansuri & Rao, 2012; Mohan & Stokke, 2000). These discussions signal that local strength is always at the core of establishing and managing schools in Nepal. So, Localism and Eastern philosophy become blended to define the social and cultural values of groups and communities working for school governance.

7.2.1.2 Belongingness Amongst School Stakeholders

Belongingness among school stakeholders has bonded them for schools' growth, which is essential in Nepali education. Nepal Ministry of Education (2009) acknowledged that "Nepal's reform in education is a response to multiple realities" (p. iii). These realities mean that school-related problems are not only academic but also involve administration, management, resources, infrastructure, information and technology, and many others (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2020a). These issues must be sorted out using the mutual effort of all kinds of stakeholders, including communities. Participatory school governance is practised through a collectivistic approach in Nepali schools (Parajuli et al., 2019). Schools have realised they cannot progress by applying a standalone approach to development as "in the collectivist culture, risk-taking behaviour is associated with cooperation and indulging the organisational member" (Rajbhandari, 2016, p. 7). Nepali school governance facilitates schools to collaborate with all stakeholders, insiders such as locals, parents and teachers, and outsiders such as bureaucrats, politicians, governments, and donors.

People are united as SMCs, PTAs, and Alumni to manage schools and gather different local resources. Cooperation with these insiders helps to gain local support, be vigilant about

the school's activities, and to mobilise local resources. People consider themselves the shareholders of the school development process and intend to take on the burden of all school issues, such as management reform and infrastructure development. Trust is a key to binding community people who work selflessly for schools (Hamal, 2022). However, the support of outsiders such as NGOs and government agencies, is essential for larger funding and making education-related policies and legislation. Public schools have limited financial resources, so they require a larger scale of support to construct school buildings. Schools use their political networks to collaborate with larger funding agencies and to become resourceful.

I explored the two-way bonding between the school and community as an important value system that keeps the value of 'us' alive and active. Schools always acknowledge community as critical for their growth. The connectedness of schools with communities is essential through formal and informal networks to positively influence children in their studies and societal roles (Dove et al., 2018). Communities also trust schools as stable institutions that can give moral and knowledge support to people when they face difficulties, such as disasters (Mooney et al., 2021). Schools contribute to social development outcomes in the areas of life skills, civic awareness, poverty reduction, and social inclusion. These societal reforms in schools substantiate that education systems are a part of the political process (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2021). It is the responsibility of schools to encourage community engagement by acknowledging their values and needs (Agbo, 2007). This appreciation brings community involvement and support to schools. The reciprocal relationship of helping each other is a part of the broader 'togetherness' value system in Nepali communities (Sk, 2016), and people use this value of oneness to unite and mobilise their strength, which benefits the growth of schools.

Overall, Eastern philosophy is all about people's belongingness, which is a strength of Nepali societies (Sapkota & Tharu, 2016). There is a culture of *marda parda*⁵⁵ to help each other in communities (Parajuli et al., 2019), and this collectivist value motivates bottom-up development practices in schools through enlarged social capital amongst insiders and outsiders. Social capital is an expanded network of human relationships which benefits people in today's world (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009). "Social capital arises from the human capacity to

⁵⁵ Available at the time of need

consider others, to think and act generously and cooperatively” (Claridge, 2018, p. 4). People in Nepali society use this capital for schools to explore resources, solve school issues collaboratively, and promote teaching-learning.

7.2.1.3 Hinduism: Connecting Schools with Communities

In Nepal, Hinduism connects the cultural sentiments of communities with schools. Nepali schools follow different Hindu functions in which students, teachers, parents, and the community are primarily engaged. Many academic discussions claim that Hindu dharma is hegemonic to religious diversity in Nepali society and tends to create homogeneity among different ethnic groups and suppress the voiceless (Cailmail, 2008; Grossman-Thompson, 2017; Pariyar & Lovett, 2016; Upadhyaya, 2011). I found the strengths of Hindu values in school governance provide religious bonding between schools and communities, an aura of a peaceful learning environment through prayers and meditation, and harmony towards all religions.

My findings on Hindu cultural values in schools resonate with Parajuli (2015), who illustrated that there exists a cultural gap between our schooling system and social realities. Education development in Nepal, is guided by the donor's mindset, aimed at producing Nepali students who can compete in the global arena. Consequently, educational policies and curricula are never designed to address local needs or promote sociocultural identities (Parajuli, 2015). Parajuli argued that "we meet the globalisation but by maintaining our localness" (p. 5). Nepal is obliged to abide by the Fourth Goal of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2021, p. 34). The United Nations is focused on the learning outcomes and their results in societies, but Hindu cultural values focus humanisation of an individual and society. There is a foundational difference between how Nepali society is culturally structured and how the global educational development plans are oriented. SDGs need contextualisation to promote Nepali school governance more locally.

Similarly, my findings on Hindu cultural values raise a debate about the legacy of Eastern cultural values in the Nepali education system. Due to the influence of globalisation, educational policymakers in Nepal have a dominant thinking that traditional socio-cultural

values of Nepali societies are hurdles to achieving global development targets (Regmi, 2021b). Wagle et al. (2019) suggested that Nepal has developed its education system based on its local realities, identities, and knowledge system. It should not adopt the "technically guided capitalist [...] measurable educational outcomes" (p.38). This means the Nepali education system must be promoted in a way that suits contexts and lives. I agree with M. N. Parajuli (2014) who mentioned that if education growth does not connect with local values and culture and continues the practice of imposed culture, globalisation will cause the extinction of diverse cultural values. "With such disappearance of diversities, the world would lose all its meaning of being a vibrant world" (p. 4). Cultural factors are the strength of Nepali values, and this needs to be embodied in educational practices.

Despite these enlightening values of Hinduism, some see Hindu dharma as hegemonic in schools. Schools must acknowledge students' religious diversity, such as those of Christian students who do not celebrate Hindu festivals. This acknowledgement gives a sense of the secular Nepal that was declared through the 2015 Constitution. During my study, I found that teachers showed kind respect for their students' diverse religions and did not force non-Hindu students to follow the rules of the dominant Hindu religion. Schools have begun to celebrate non-Hindu festivals such as Christmas to acknowledge the religious rights of every child. Hinduism has a principle of '*vasuvaidha kutmbakam*', which means the world is one family (Bhattarai & Nepali, 2021). I found that the coexistence of different values in Nepali society (Gautam & Shyangtan, 2020a) have tended to make the school environment harmonious. These cultural benchmarks of Nepali societies have sustained Nepali school education and strengthened its governance.

In Nepali society, Hindu identities have been preserved in the education system by bringing locals to schools. Localism is not only "a reaction to the political centralisation or the impact on local communities of economic and political globalisation" (Harmes, 2021, p. 12), but is also the preservation of local identity. People's participation in any social event is meaningfully ensured if they have a shared value (Holman & Rydin, 2013). Religion has connected people with schools, and religion and localism go together as localism prioritises societal values at the core, including people's diversity and cultural values (Wardhono &

Yunianti, 2020). Community people go to school, attend Saraswoti puja and worship the Goddess Saraswoti along with teachers and students. This spiritual activity makes the school's environment harmonious, peaceful, and pleasant. Religion is an intangible aspect of culture that passes from one generation to another as a spiritual practice, and it shapes human civilisation (Siwakoti & Adhikari, 2018). Cultural values cannot be ignored in achieving sustainable human development (Pei, 2016). Localisation of SDGs that include faith in God, spirituality, and cultural practices are important to achieving the development targets in Nepali education. More importantly, the diverse religious practices of students need to be valued through educational policies and practices at schools. Generally, Hinduism has bonded communities and schools as single entity in Nepali society. Overall, the religious values in Nepali societies have strengthened localism in school governance.

7.2.1.4 Orthodox Values: Constraining Educational Growth

In my research, I have found that orthodox beliefs, such as social class hierarchies, patriarchy, and local supremacy, are unsupportive to the sound school governance. These findings resonate with the claim of the Nepal Ministry of Education which mentioned that "socio-cultural-construct of the society [...] contributes to the continued educational disparities based on gender, caste, ethnicity, religion, and disabilities" (Nepal Ministry of Education and Sports, 2003, p. 48). I now move onto a discussion of the educational disparities caused by class division, patriarchy, and local supremacy.

Wealthy Managers and Poor Parents in Public Schools: Producing Two Classes of Citizens

Nepali public education produces two classes of citizens and brings about social divisions: rich people as school managers, and the parents/students from poor economic backgrounds. The finding on the rich manager and poor parents/students in a public school resonates with a conflict theory perspective, which states that the best jobs in societies are done by high-class people (Omer & Jabeen, 2016). Wagle et al. (2019) highlighted that parents feel it is a matter of prestige to send children to private schools. As mentioned earlier, most public-school students are from poor, migrant, so-called untouchable caste groups and girls,

while SMC Chairs and members represent privileged classes in society who are socially, economically and politically influential. These privileged classes do not enrol their children in public schools but take charge of public-school governance. My participant, Ms Chup, an elected representative in the Patan Metropolitan city, said, "Out of several societal conflicts in our country, one is the class division amongst people due to the education they receive. If they receive a quality education, they will get good jobs and live decently; otherwise, they must go abroad to do menial jobs as a labourer ". This mismatch between the school leadership roles and beneficiaries is one of the backdrops of public education. My findings on wealthy managers and poor students resonate with the research of Pherali (2012), Regmi (2017) and Parajuli and Das (2013). Pherali (2012) commented that the Nepali education system has been unable to promote socially backward classes; instead, education plays a role in reinforcing inequalities in societies (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, as cited in Regmi, 2017). Parajuli and Das (2013) found that social exclusion exists in the education system because it reproduces the culture and values of privileged classes.

I found there is a welcoming environment for rich and politically capable people who are usually locals, in the SMC. The majority of public-school parents represent economically impoverished backgrounds, and they are fully engaged in earning activities to make their living. They give less time to schools, and if they are migrants, their social capital is unlikely to help the schools. Due to this, the SMCs are occupied by politically powerful persons who can give time to the school and bring more funds. These circumstances signalled that locals' rich and political identities are established as hegemony in school governance. This situation is further explained by Aidi and Yechouti (2017), who reviewed Anthony Gramsci's work on hegemony:

It is to be noted that those in power can achieve social control in two different ways: domination and hegemony. The former is used when the latter fails. In other words, when the ruling class successfully establishes the consent of the ruled people, oppression and force are no longer needed. (p. 005)

Privileged classes quickly get spaces in public school SMCs, although they do not enrol their children in these schools. Poor parents and school administration happily agreed with the leadership roles of locally influential people in the SMC because parents and the schools expect to have progressive changes in the school through efficient leadership. As a result, socially and

politically influential people are selected as SMC Chairs and members. In a perverse way, poverty is influential because it determines who leads the school management team and who enrolls children in public schools.

Uprooting Patriarchy in School Governance as a Social Problem

There are many culturally and legally inclusive policies for women in public institutions. However, I found that their level of participation in school governance to be limited. Hinduism highly respects females as mothers, earth, and goddesses; this acknowledgement is considered dharma (Patel, 1994), and laws have been made to include women's voices in school governance. The Seventh Amendment of the 1971 Education Act in 2001 included that there would be at least one woman in the SMC of nine members (Nepal Law Commission, 2001). This number has been increased to at least three with the Eighth Amendment of the 2016 Education Act (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b). The 2015 Constitution guaranteed the rights of women to participate in all bodies of the state (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2015). So low participation of women in school governance is not a cultural and legal issue in Nepal; instead it is a social issue.

Gender inclusion in school governance in Nepal is a social problem. Women still struggle to raise their voices in school meetings, and their participation in school activities is limited (Dhakal, 2021; Sijapati, 2019). The patriarchal mindset is deeply rooted in Nepali society (Nowack, 2015), which limits women's ability to engage in school governance and display their potential. Neupane (2019) included that "social exclusion is a structural problem that cannot be solved by welfare handouts" (p. 93). Women also thought they would be burdened with household chores if they spent time unproductively attending school meetings (Sijapati, 2019). So, enabling environments have to be created for women to seek out equal and active roles in school governance (Adhikari & Adhikari, 2021). In order to overcome patriarchal practices, cultural and local activities should acknowledge the potential of women in today's modern societies (Dhakal, 2021; Nowack, 2015). If this were to happen, men and women could collaboratively contribute to school governance, strengthening localism.

Local Supremacy for Self-benefit

Regarding local supremacy, people are keen to hold power related to schools and locals contributed to schooling because " they saw it as a gateway to the state bureaucracy and thus as access to the power and resources associated with it" (Parajuli, 2008, p. 312). They often wish to become the SMC Chair and members to control the school's resources, control teachers and Head Teachers, and form groups against teachers from different localities. This negative form of local supremacy is likely to continue until there is a higher influence of political parties in schools and people perceive schools as a state entity. The next discussion is on the political influences on school governance.

7.2.2 New Public Management-Global Governance Theories on School Governance

In this chapter section, I discuss the findings on the positive and negative influences of politics in school governance through the lens of New Public Management-Global Governance theories.

7.2.2.1 Efficient Team and Local Governance in Education: Political Negotiations

I found two positive influences of politics in school governance: an efficient team selection for school management and practices of local governance in education. NPM initiatives in an institution focus on improving the managerial efficiency of a public institutions by increasing its accessibility and making it competitive with good outcomes (Haque, 2004). The managerial reform of public schools began in early 2000 with the provision of the SMCs. The Seventh Amendment of the 1971 Education Act included that the SMC Chair was to be selected amongst the parents (Nepal Law Commission, 2001). This provision was revised through the Eighth Amendment of the 1971 Education Act in 2016, which mentioned that apart from teachers, any capable person in the SMC can be the Chair (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b). In this perspective, many locals wish to become an SMC Chair or members due to the perceived glamour of the SMC's power in schools. These locals may be non-parents, but they are the socially and politically influential, whose expertise is seen to help schools to grow academically via efficient management. NPM also stresses "hands-on professional management in the public sector" (Hood, 1991, p. 4); thereby, parents and schools accept the engagement of efficient people from communities who will make sound management and focus on better school

results. Politics is a key to encouraging negotiations and dialogues between the school stakeholders to select capable persons for the SMCs. Rajbhandari (2016) acknowledged that the SMC model in Nepali public education is an example of NPM reform, and this reform aims to make public administration output-oriented (Gautam, 2008, September 18). I found that politics is a key to reforming the management of public education in Nepal, which connects to the New Public Management reform.

Similarly, I found that politics is crucial to bringing positive changes in decentralising Nepal's school governance. NPM stresses making public service delivery efficient by decentralising the decision-making authorities to the implementation levels (Kearney & Hays, 1998). In education reform, "state [government] from manager to facilitator of schooling" carries the motives of NPM (Carney et al., 2007, p. 611). Studies support the principle that decentralisation of school management to the local level yields better education outputs (Kharel, 2017; Nepal Ministry of Education, 2009; Nepal National Planning Commission, 2016). The introduction of local governance in Nepali school education was a political decision mentioned in the 2015 Constitution, and this decision aimed to bring educational reforms through power decentralisation to lower levels of Government.

Local Governments work closely with people and play an essential role in developing schooling education. Similar to the claim of Halligan (2020), and Keuffer and Horber-Papazian (2020), the delegation of school-related authorities by the Central Government to the local governments is the adoption of horizontal governance, which encompasses multiple stakeholders in the policy planning and implementation process. The horizontal exercise of power prioritises the roles of bottom stakeholders in any development initiatives (Kurland et al., 2012). Mansuri and Rao (2012) have elaborated that the development process becomes effective and result-oriented if it is an initiative of both the central government and local actors. Rizvi and Lingard (2009) explained that the actual devolution of power only happens when people have the right to make decisions and exert control. In my research context, the education-related powers have been devolved to local governments representing people at the community level, and these governments have taken a critical role in the growth of school education through the local education Act, local curricula, local leadership during the COVID

pandemic, and by facilitating the teacher management plans of the Central Government. Apart from these NPM-related reforms, I discuss some backdrops of politics in school governance in the following section.

7.2.2.2 Power Accumulation, Party Politics, and Donor's Dependency: Political Fallacies

In school governance, I explored power centralisation by local governments, party politics in SMCs and teachers' unions and increasing schools' dependency on donors. New Public Management Reforms in schools have to deal with these political resistances for making sound school governance.

Firstly, local governments in Nepal are concentrating on power accumulation related to school education. The 2015 Constitution and the 2017 Local Government Operation Act legitimised local governments taking guardianship of public education (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2015, 2017a). However, I found that these governments want to control the SMCs and assume school powers instead of prioritising the growth of schools. These governments carry the agendas of their mother political parties and cannot work neutrally for people's welfare. Nepal Ministry of Education (2021) confessed that “Local Governments are often accused of imposing political interests in schools’ affairs” (p. 135). These local governments seem accountable towards the Central Government for “power including necessary funds, authority and the removal of political and administrative barriers for fulfilling their mandate” (Dhungana et al., 2021, p. 21). The dominance of the Central Government also infers that educational-related powers have not been fully decentralised to the local level in Nepal (Hamal, 2020). This power exercise results in nominating persons to the SMCs who are members of the political parties.

In this chaos of power play, local governments want executive roles in the SMCs in order to amass school-related powers. This activity of the local governments is also supported by the 2019 National Education Policy, which mentions that the SMCs work as the supportive organisations of the Local Governments in managing school education (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2019). The active roles of the local Government will cut off the roles of the communities in schools. However, the social reality of promoting schools is different in Nepali society; it is unique to the Nepali context that schools are taken care of and supported through the mutual effort of communities (Hamal, 2022; Laurent-Olive & Bourn, 2020; Pradhan et al.,

2019). A community is always at the forefront of the growth of a school because a community is a permanent structure, whereas elected representatives and bureaucrats in Local Governments are for fixed terms. However, this school-related power devolvement to local governments has a risk of distancing communities from schools, and high influence of these governments will limit the school's autonomy in decision makings.

Secondly, the SMCs have the tasks of making sound school governance decisions by mobilising local strength and resources. However, I found that political parties send their cadres to these SMCs, and these cadres seek power and try to influence parents, teachers, and the community (Khanal & Ghimire, 2022). Paradoxically, some parents and schools welcome these political leaders into SMCs, as they can support schools with their ideas, networks and sources of finance. This involvement of politically influential people in schools is a kind of political hegemony by the ruling class. As people from impoverished backgrounds lack the competency to perform any social development activities, they seek the support of the ruling class, which is explained as a hegemony of the rich class by Aidi and Yechouti (2017). These ruling classes in the school governance in Nepal are predominantly political leaders who engage in schools in order to earn might and position in society. In addition, the partisan identities of teachers' unions have undermined the public schools in the country. These unions have become a powerful political entity, and they are accused of not supporting the government's will in the nationwide management of teachers and making teachers' accountable for their duties (United Nations Children's Fund, 2017). The political exercises of teachers to gain power and prestige are degrading their professional roles and values in Nepali society (Khadka & Bhattarai, 2021). This view resonates with the claim that "Politics has done more harm than good to the Nepalese school education system" (Dhungana, 2012, p. 4).

Thirdly, politics makes schools dependent on donors and governments to receive considerable funding. Foreign aid is inevitable for Nepal's development (Nepal Ministry of Finance, 2017; Nepal National Planning Commission, 2020a); however, the trend of getting global support for education has negative impacts. Aid flowing from donors and governments contains top-down policies that do not make schools sustainable (Dahal, 2021; Regmi, 2021b). While lending any support, donors maintain dominancy, and the aid-receiving countries have to

accept the terms and conditions imposed by the donors (Regmi, 2019; Regmi, 2017). I found that schools use their political networking to receive significant aid from donors, as it is easy to receive and has significant impacts on the school's infrastructure development. I found that this aid-receiving political process completely disregards the role of communities. Due to this, the community's values, such as getting together to establish, manage, and sustain school education are gradually waning. Uniting for a noble cause in society has become a rare thing, and modernisation could be blamed for distorting this social value. Modernisation is also blamed for homogenising people's thinking and influencing the roles of technology in human lives (Reyes, 2001). Due to the adoption of modern habits, people's personal and social needs differ from those of their preceding generations (Panahi, 2015). This trend has brought a social change that weakened school-community relationships in Nepali society. Politics has not played a role in bridging community strengths, school needs, and donor values; instead, political activities are busy increasing the volume of aid from donors to schools.

I have explored other side effects of education aid to Nepal. The aid-receiving mechanism in Nepal for educational development can be explained by global governance theory, which has been criticised as it has emerged from the worldview of the West managing the globalisation process (Benedict, 2015). Developed nations use aid as a political tool to direct developing nations and control global politics (Zürn, 2013). The World Bank was established by western countries who were supportive to the liberal economy and societies, and the Bank tries to influence the value of liberalism to the aid borrower states with liberal values (Mundy & Verger, 2015). International agencies such as the World Bank support Nepal with funding and reforming educational policies (Regmi, 2015, 2021a); the decentralisation of school governance through SMCs began with the financial support of the World Bank in 2003 (Sharma, 2008). Academic debates signal that the NPM-related reform in Nepali education, which is backstopped by global governance theory, has the risk of imposing western values such as liberalism and privatisation in Nepali societies. NPM theory embeds capitalistic visions, as the theory is based on transforming welfare-oriented bureaucracy into a system that is market-friendly, competitive and outcome-based (Haque, 2004; Marobela, 2008). However, the socio-political context in Nepal is different. The adoption of capitalistic values is against the spirit of

the constitution of Nepal, as the country commits to socialism-based political values based on democratic rights. Nepal's socialism-oriented economic development stands upon the mutual effort of public, private, and cooperative sectors (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2015). Socialism advocates “equal life standards and distribution of wealth” (Bedir, 2021, p. 5777), which is opposite to liberal policies that value competition and privatisation. Nepal needs global aid for its growth but must be cautious about the negative impacts of global governance on education development. Overall, politics are influential in bringing outside funding from the Government and donors; however, this trend widens school-community relations and imposes western values of capitalism.

In summary, NPM reforms facilitate bringing in capable persons to the SMCs to support school governance. The glamour of power exercised through the SMC also attracts locals to contribute to schools. The diverse human capital in schools contributes their ideas, time, and expertise, and explores finance which would bring managerial reforms. Similarly, the decentralisation of public-school management is another positive outcome of NPM in Nepal. However, Local Governments, SMCs, and teacher unions often misuse political authority to rule over school education and earn might and position. Politics has been vital in bringing donors funding, which has resulted in increasing the schools’ dependency on donors and weakening school-community relations. In summary, politics is both a positive and negative playmaker in managerial reform and the flourishing local education governance of public schools in Nepal.

7.3 Step Three: Understanding School Governance in the Contexts of Local Values and Political Influences

Governance is “an art of steering societies and an organisation” (Plumptre & Graham, 1999, p. 3). It is a platform in which stakeholders exercise their authority and power to influence decision-making (Nepal Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development 2008). Scholarly discussions in Nepal emphasise poor school governance and its role in deteriorating educational quality (Baral, 2013; A. R. Bhattarai, 2022; Carney et al., 2007; Hamal, 2020; Khadka, 2021; Khanal & Timilsena, 2022; Khanal & Ghimire, 2022; Laurent-Olive & Bourn, 2020; Parajuli, 2007; Pherali, 2012; Rajbhandari, 2016). This literature reiterates good

governance practices do not exist in schools but provides limited discussion on how our school governance is shaped. The question of “how to improve governance? is of course the most pressing from a policy perspective. It cannot be rigorously answered without first better addressing the concept of good governance: how to improve what exactly?” (Gisselquist, 2012, p. 22). My research, which explored how school governance in Nepal is constituted in the context of people’s local values and political influences, suggests what are the strengths and areas that need to be improved.

School governance in Nepal is built upon the concept of multi-stakeholders’ engagement by locals, parents, teachers, Head Teachers, elected representatives, and Education Officers. I found that local values, such as the philanthropic engagement of communities, the belongingness value of stakeholders for schools, and Hindu values, bond schools and communities. People voluntarily participate in school activities due to their social and cultural motivation to promote education, and they creatively and critically support the school management to grow and perform well. This engagement of locals tends to make a school's management transparent and accountable towards students and parents. Citizen participation in public works is essential to making public institutions accountable and ensuring the government works for mass welfare (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014). Similarly, the value of belongingness and teaming-up local stakeholders who have the social capital to help make schools more resourceful. This initiative makes schools less dependent on Central Government grants and explores local opportunities for schools to grow. The utilisation of local resources and local generation of the resources, which the central government cannot provide, supports the principle of decentralisation in school governance (World Bank, 1988, as cited in Weiler, 1990). Likewise, the value of Hinduism helps make the school environment sacred and peaceful. Teachers and students conduct prayers and worship the gods, receive tika and prasad from seniors, and share the warmth of love. Communities take part in Hindu functions in schools, and schools use the Saraswoti puja day to enrol new students as parents believe that this is a holy day to begin the new enrolments. Hinduism binds schools and communities, makes the school environment peaceful and joyous and facilitates school enrolment campaigns. These social and cultural effects of Nepali society are the foundation of school governance. M.

Parajuli (2014) agreed that people use their local knowledge systems that have evolved through a rigorous process of trial and error over generations, and Hussain (2021) asserted that culture strengthens social relationships and makes human relations alive. Culture gives purpose to human life by connecting people's sentiments with a shared value. However, there exist pitfalls to local values, such as separation of social class in the roles of school managers and students, patriarchy in school governance roles, and local supremacy to earn benefits from school-associated power. These conservative values must be addressed to ensure inclusive and participatory school development.

Likewise, politics is an integral component of Nepali school governance, as these governance structures are the forum for power exercise in schools (see Nepal Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development 2008). Politics is related to the power relations that give “capacity to influence others” (Osieja, 2021, p. 4). The glamour of power and status has attracted residents and local governments to serve in school management roles voluntarily. Most of these locals are retired bureaucrats, political leaders, local entrepreneurs, and social activists who have had hands-on experience in school building construction, school management, accounting, resource mobilisation, and team building. Politics facilitates the engagement and priorities of local stakeholders to work in schools. An efficient management team will contribute to the sound reform of a public institution by leading it towards an outcome-based institution (Lapiente & Van de Walle, 2020). In addition, it was a political agreement to introduce local education governance in Nepal. Local governance is an essential element of decentralising political authority to lower levels of governments (Subedi & Subedi, 2021). Local governments create a bridge between the schools and central government, thus bringing in resources and funding, and local governments assume guardianship of schools in coordination with the SMCs. These governments facilitate making local education Acts and local curricula and have proven their leadership roles in continuing school education during the COVID pandemic. Nevertheless, politics in school governance is blamed for power accumulation by local governments, the partisanship of SMCs and teacher unions, and increasing school dependency on donors. These roles of politics are widening school-community relations and making schools entities apart from society. The 2016 School Sector Development Plan

mentioned reducing the political affiliation of teachers, staff and managers, and making them closer to communities (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016b). These drawbacks of politics need to be minimised to bring efficient managerial reforms to education through the New Public Management idea.

Figure 8 *Understanding School Governance*

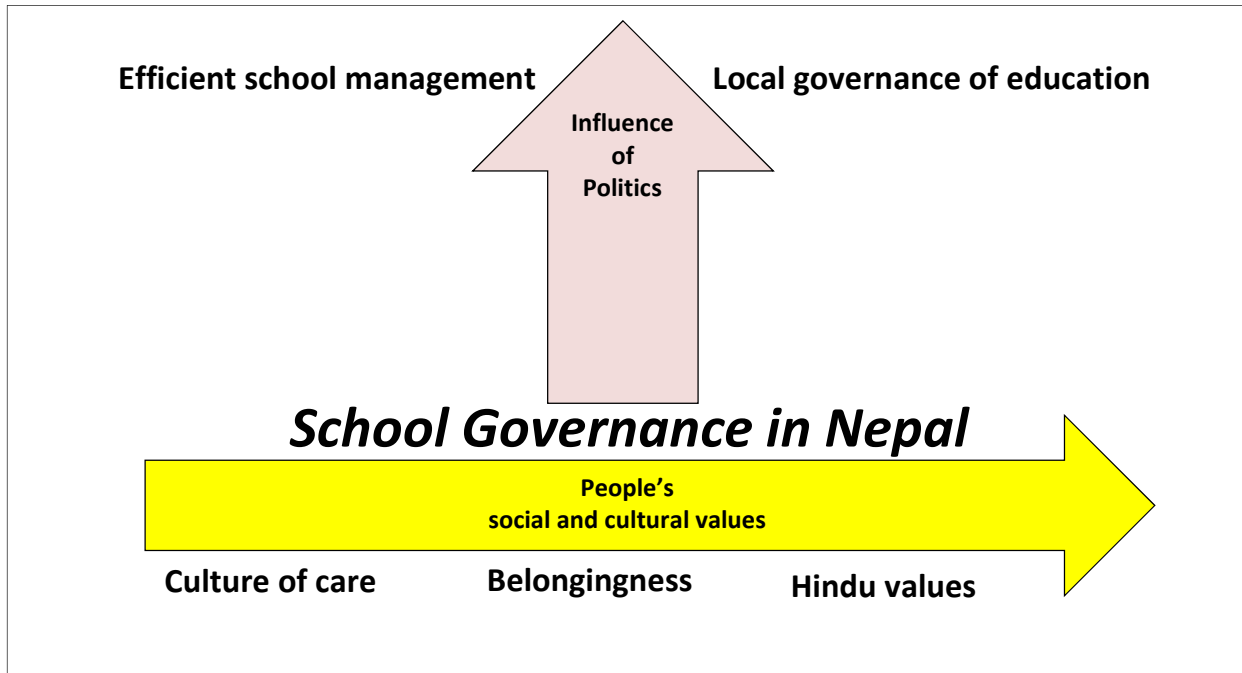


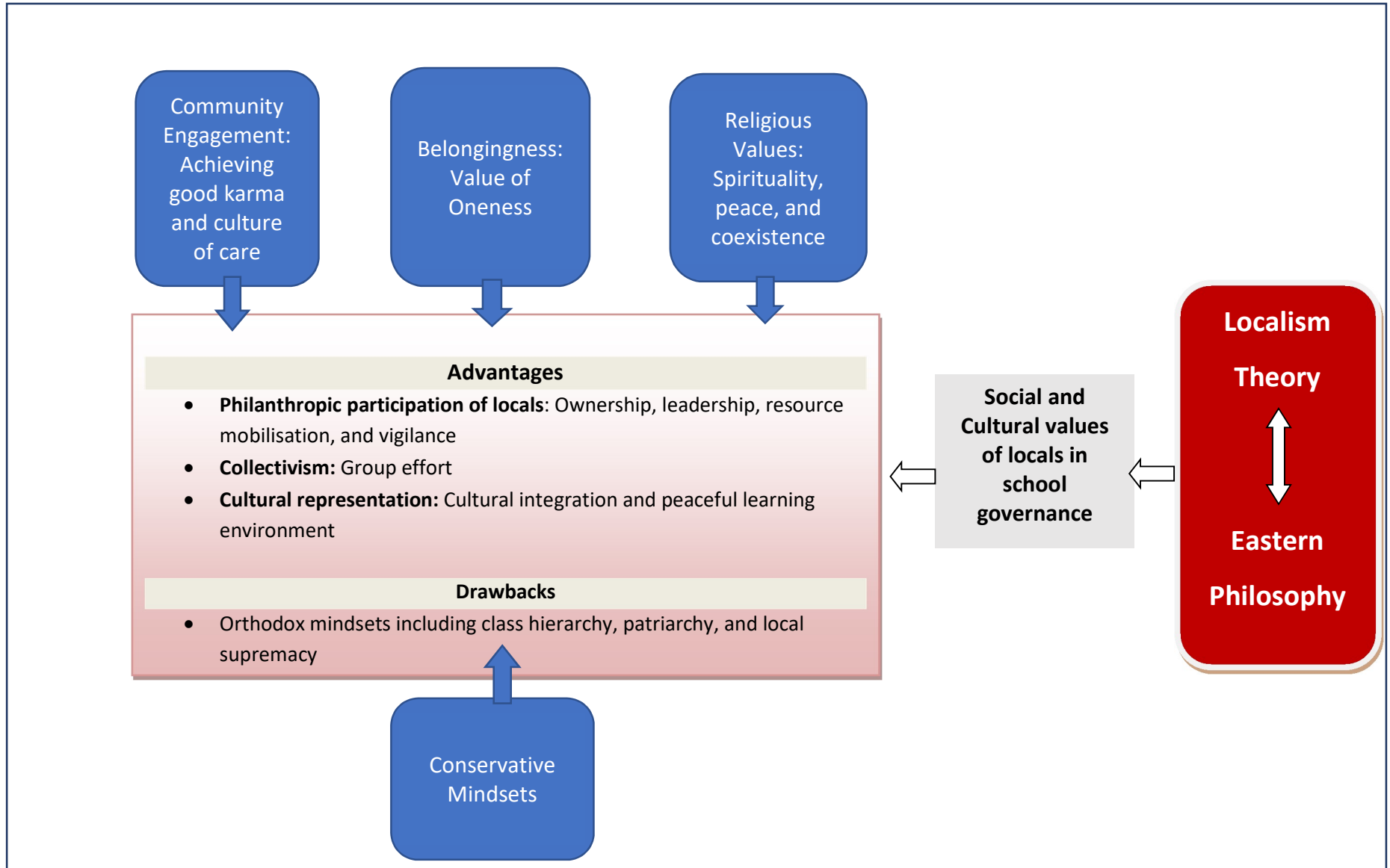
Figure 8 shows that local values prepare the foundation of a school through the ideas of a caring culture, belongingness, and religious values amongst school stakeholders. At the same time, politics facilitates a school's vertical growth through transformative changes in school management and decentralised school governance with the New Public Management model. A managerial reform in school governance that is founded on local's social and cultural values will strengthen Nepali school governance. Overall, local values and political influences have built school governance in Nepal.

7.3.1 Diagrammatic Representation of my Findings on School Governance

The following Figure 9 represents the roles of social and cultural values of groups and communities in school governance. Locals are engaged in a school because they own the school as public property, and their participation and leadership have supported the school through resources and management. They also keep vigilant watch on the school's activities and transactions to make them transparent and accountable. These locals are shaped by Eastern philosophical values such as togetherness, collectivism, and karma. Hindu rituals in schools bond schools and communities and make the school environment peaceful and harmonious. Despite these, conservative values such as class hierarchy, patriarchy, and local supremacy prevail in school governance.

Figure 9 Local Values in School Governance

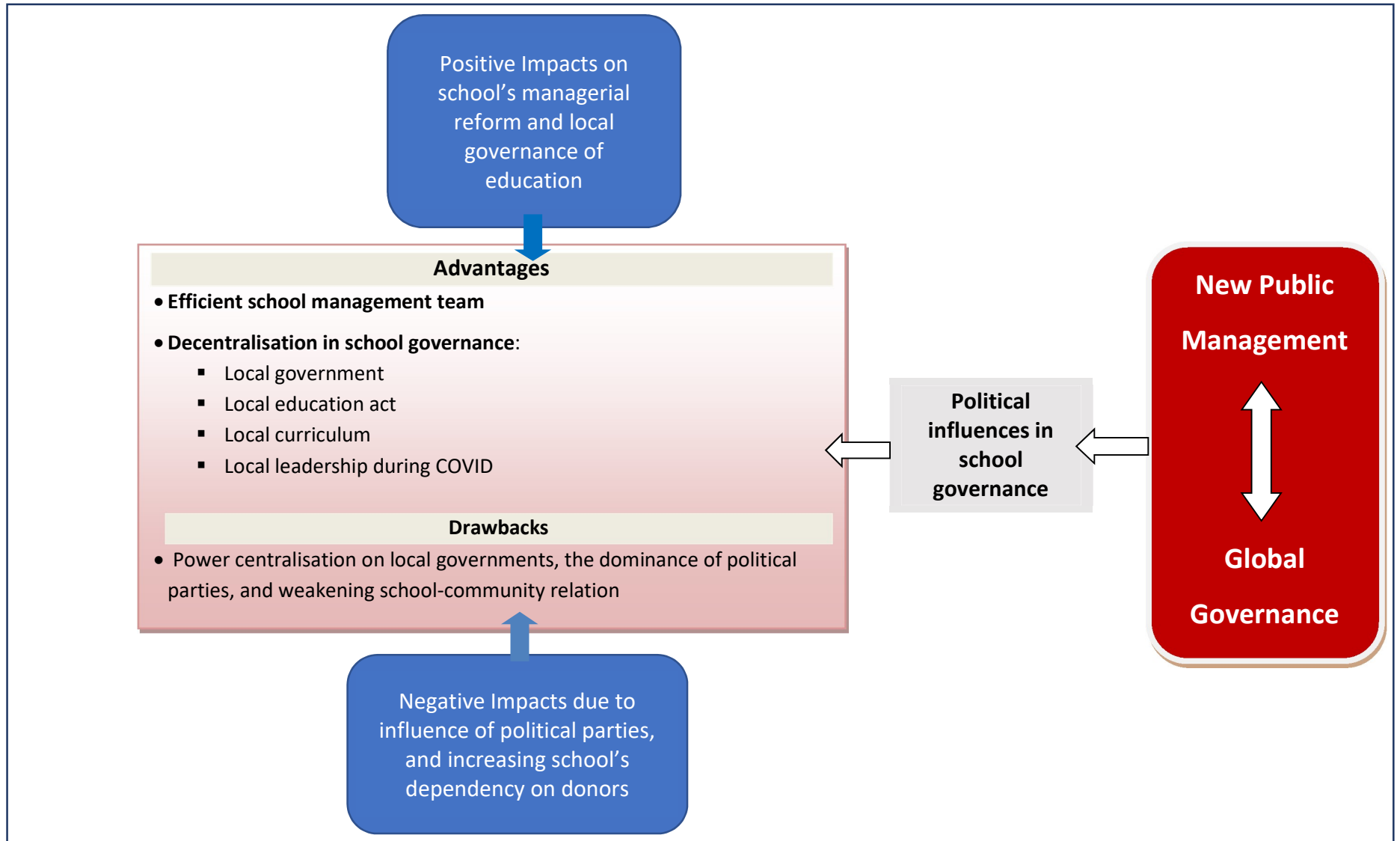
RQ1: What cultural and social values of groups and communities in Lalitpur Nepal, encourage working for school governance?



The following Figure 10 represents the influences of politics on school governance. An efficient and professional management team in public schools is available through the SMCs. Due to the status of power in schools, the engagement and interests of locals has increased. Schools have benefitted through work division between locals and teachers, and locals are engaged in exploring and bringing resources, developing school infrastructure, and keeping vigilant about school development activities. As a result, teachers can focus on good academic outputs. In addition, local governments are the ultimate decision-makers in promoting school education, as is mentioned in the 2015 Constitution. These governments have formed local education Acts and local schooling curricula, shown leadership to sustain education during the COVID-pandemic, and helped the Central Government to implement the 2016 Teachers' Redeployment Plan. This plan was brought for the management of teachers across the country through their redeployment to local government areas having fewer teachers. These political initiatives have made the schools accountable, transparent, and output-oriented. The power-sharing between the locals, SMCs, and local governments has resulted in infrastructure development, quality education, and sound management of schools. Despite these, there prevails negative influences of politics in school governance. The local governments want to control school-related powers, there is party dominance on SMCs and teacher unions, and politics is responsible for making schools dependent on donors and this is widening school-community relations.

Figure 10 Political Influences in School Governance

RQ2: How do political influences shape groups and communities' involvement or otherwise in school governance in Lalitpur, Nepal?



7.4 School Governance in the Research's Conceptual Framework

My research's conceptual framework used an interplay between theories and narrative methodology to analyse and interpret narrative findings (see Chapter Three). The social constructionism lens guided me in exploring the realities of school governance by interacting with the school stakeholders. I adopted a narrative inquiry methodology to collect the narratives of my participants. My participants revealed their lived experiences regarding their involvement in schools, which helped me to uncover their social and cultural values and the influence of politics in school governance. I used the Localism-Eastern Philosophy theory to elaborate findings related to local values. In this research, I found people's cultural and religious values prepared them to perform philanthropic roles in schools, unite to help in the growth of schools, and develop cultural bonding between schools and communities. These activities support school governance through participation, local resource collection, and making the school environment peaceful. Likewise, I referred to New Public Management-Global governance theory to describe findings on political influences. Politics favours bringing efficient local leadership to serve the schools through the SMCs. Local governments use their political authority to prepare local education Acts, local curricula, and to take a leadership role in sustaining schooling education during the COVID pandemic. These political activities bring managerial reforms in public schools and decentralisation of school governance roles to local governments and communities.

7.5 Chapter Summary

I have discussed the narrative findings on school governance and have developed their meaning in the context of people's values and political influences. People's local values that help school governance are observed through their philanthropic roles, team building, and religious attachment to schools; however, orthodox values of locals such as class hierarchies, patriarchy, and local supremacy resist the inclusive development of schools. Similarly, political exercises bring managerial reforms in schools and facilitate the decentralisation of school governance authority to local stakeholders; however, politics has some negatives in school governance, such as the influence of party politics in Local Governments, SMCs, and teacher

unions, and the increasing dependency of schools on donors. The next section presents the conclusion and implications of my research.

Chapter Eight

Concluding Thoughts: Implications and Recommendations

In my narrative research, I gathered the lived experiences of school stakeholders to explore school governance in the context of local values and political influences. In this chapter, I provide my research's conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

Initially, I reflect upon my research journey to show how I crafted my narrative research in the three sections as: initial thoughts, storytelling, and meaning making on school governance. I then briefly restate the key findings of my study in six themes relating to school governance: community engagement, belongingness value, Hindu religion, conservative mindsets, managerial reforms, and party dominance. I present the limitations that have influenced my research process, followed by the research's implications for academic scholars and policymakers. I propose several recommendations relating to the school governance of Nepal. My study supports more exciting areas to research in relation to school governance which I indicate in the scope for further research. At the end, my final thoughts end this research by reinstating the key knowledge contribution and foreseeing my academic journey in education research.

8.1 Reflecting on the Thesis Writing

In Nepal, communities take care of and manage public schools through the School Management Committees (SMCs). As a former public-school teacher, I was always fascinated by delving into a school-community relationship and knowing how this relationship works best for sound school governance. This curiosity encouraged me to conduct this narrative inquiry research and explore school governance in the context of local values and political influences as experienced. In this context, the thesis writing includes three parts.

Part One: Beginning the Journey about School Governance presents my starting ideas and plan to conduct this study. Chapter One includes my positionalities as a former school teacher, a local in Lalitpur, and a Hindu believer. These positionalities set a background to frame the research's purpose in investigating school governance in the context of Eastern Philosophy. In Chapter Two, I reviewed the literature about school governance, community

involvement in school management roles, and school politics. I found that there was limited literature on how Nepali school governance is constituted, how communities support schools in the present context, how Hindu values are adopted in school governance, how politics bring positive reforms in schools, and how the donors' funding impacts school-community relations. I then conceptualised my research conceptual framework in Chapter Three, where I detailed the interplay between a social constructionist worldview, narrative theory, Localism-Eastern Philosophy, New Public Management-Global Governance theories, and narrative inquiry methodology. I chose a social constructionist worldview, which supports the notion that social realities are created through human interactions (Galbin, 2014; Hansen, 2004). Narrative theory guided me to value social phenomena and explore social realities and human voices through stories (Moen, 2006; Wang & Geale, 2015). Localism-Eastern Philosophy theories helped me to interpret narrative findings related to people's local values in school governance. New Public Management-Global Governance theories guided me to explain findings on the influence of politics and donor funding in schools. Chapter Four is the methodology chapter in which I detailed the process I applied to conduct this narrative study in the three schools in Lalitpur. I presented my study area, schools, and participants. I wrote the ethical procedures that I applied in the field to conduct this qualitative research.

Part Two: Storytelling on School Governance presents the findings about school governance through the narratives of forty-three participants. In Chapter Five, the cultural and social values that encouraged participants to work in school governance are expressed. I thematised participants' narratives as community engagement, belongingness, religion and education, and orthodox mindsets. In Chapter Six, participants' narratives detailed how the power exercised reform school management, and the significance of local governance in education. I presented narratives related to the negative influences of party politics in schools and the increase in school dependency on donors.

Part Three: Exploring School Governance, discusses the lived experiences of my participants in relation to school governance in public schools in Lalitpur. In Chapter Seven, I interpret narratives by referring to literature, theories, and my own experiences. The chapter explores how social history, ethical and moral values, and the Hindu religion have shaped local

people's contributions to school governance. Similarly, politics facilitates bringing capable persons to work in SMCs, making schools financially resourceful, and enabling sound school management. The local governance of school education is being institutionalised through local governments, local education Acts, local curricula, and local leadership. Chapter Eight (this chapter) details the implications and recommendations of my research for scholarly communities and policymakers.

8.2 Key Research Findings

My research's key finding on school governance resonates with the view of Gisselquist (2012), , who mentioned that "how to improve governance" is not helpful unless it is identified "how to improve what exactly?" (p. 22). I have explored how school governance in Nepal is constituted through two domains: people's local values and the influence of politics.

8.2.1 People's Local Values on School Governance

Four key research findings on people's local values on school governance involve community engagement in schools, the value of belongingness among school stakeholders, the nexus between Hinduism and schools, and conservative values that resist sound school governance.

Community's Engagements in Schools: A Culture of Care

Before the 1990s People's Movement in Nepal, educational development was not a priority of the Rana and Panchayat rulers (Bhatta & Mehendale, 2019; Pradhan et al., 2019; Shrestha, 2003). The two autocratic regimes were in political power from 1846 to 1990. After the 1950s, people started establishing schools through their own efforts by donating cash, manual labour, and land for schools (Pradhan et al., 2019; Shrestha, 2014). Communities were involved in establishing schools, which would make people aware of their democratic rights through education. It was a matter of honour for communities to have a school in their place (Pande, 2003). People's culture of care for public schools gradually developed as the value of people has been passed on to the present generation. In the present governance context, people take care of schools by engaging in the SMCs, PTAs, alumni, and advisory committees. People voluntarily work to make schools resourceful and contribute to strengthening the management systems. This is an example of localism that motivates people to collaborate and utilise their potential for social development initiatives, such as school welfare (Painter et al.,

2011). People's enthusiasm behind developing the education system stems from their Hindu cultural orientation. Hinduism envisions a knowledge-led society and encourages people to enact good Karmas for humanity (Atkinson, 2010; Mukherjee, 2015).

Belongingness among School Stakeholders

Social connectivity is a value in Nepali society that binds people and encourages them to utilise their strengths for schools (Sapkota & Tharu, 2016). Schools have established cordial relationships with outside stakeholders, such as NGOs, donors, Education Officers, and Government, who provide funding, resources, and legislation for smooth operations. Similarly, schools have strong relationships with SMCs, PTAs, teachers, parents, alumni, advisors, and child clubs, who help mobilise local resources, have ideas on schools' management, and take responsibility for construction-related works. A reciprocal relationship exists between schools and communities. Schools support communities by producing capable human resources and providing land, buildings, and assets for community functions. Schools strengthen the political process of societal development by generating capable human resources, alleviating poverty, and promoting civic awareness (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2021). In return, communities support schools with care, respect, and exploring local resources. Communities share schools' management issues as a part of the collectivist working culture (Rajbhandari, 2016). The value of 'us' among different school stakeholders has flourished in participatory governance in Nepali schools (Parajuli et al., 2019). This is motivated by the belongingness value of Eastern Philosophy.

Hinduism in Schools: Connecting with Communities

Hindu practices in Nepali schools are usually due to the adoption of Hinduism by the majority of people in the country. Schools celebrate the annual Saraswoti Puja⁵⁶ festival to worship the Goddess of Education. Every school has temples of Saraswoti where students and teachers gather for worship and prayers (Shrestha, 2022, June 21). Schools try to acknowledge the religious diversity of all children; however, there are parental voices that every religion should be represented in school functions. Hindu worship makes the school environment

⁵⁶ Religious worship and prayer

peaceful, spiritual and blessed. Hindu cultural values are represented in school activities and have shaped Nepali school governance by connecting schools with communities.

Conservatism and Resistance to Sound School Governance

Conservative values, such as class segregation, patriarchy, and a negative form of local supremacy, exist in the school governance structures. Class segregation is observed as rich people take charge of school management roles in public schools. At the same time, low-income families such as *Dalits* and migrants, as well as girls are enrolled in these schools, which exemplifies social inequality, as expressed by Omer and Jabeen (2016). Patriarchy is rampant in the SMCs as women are less represented and heard in school meetings (Dhakal, 2021; Sijapati, 2019). Vocal males are dominant in the SMCs and PTAs, and women have less influence in school decisions. Locals use their strengths for self-benefit, such as misusing school property and resisting teachers coming from different places. This self-benefitting role of people is motivated by their perception of public schools as a gateway to the state's bureaucracy (Parajuli, 2008). I found that conservative values regarding class hierarchy, patriarchy, and local supremacy are driven by social and cultural interests, which hinder inclusive school development (Nepal Ministry of Education and Sports, 2003). The prevalence of conservative values in Nepali school governance is against the socio-cultural values in Nepali society, such as the value of diversity (Dhungana, 2021), the value of oneness (Sapkota & Tharu, 2016), the value of community (Bista, 1991, as cited in Laurent-Olive & Bourn, 2020), and the value of similarity amongst people (Rautaray et al., 2022).

8.2.2 Political Influences on School Governance

I have presented key findings on political influences on school governance as bringing managerial reforms and party dominance in school governance.

Bringing Managerial Reforms of Public Schools: Positive Influences of Politics

Political exercise by parties through the SMCs have developed Nepali public schools as power centres (Carney et al., 2007; Pherali, 2012). Due to the attraction of power, efficient and capable people are drawn to work in the SMCs and help schools' educational growth and management. SMCs also help to develop social relationships with parents, teachers, and locals, so the position of SMC Chair is lucrative for political people who aspire to be leaders. The

efficient SMCs focus on improving outputs and outcomes in education. Politics has also institutionalised local school education governance, a new practice started after the 2015 Constitution. Local governments are catalysts to prepare and implement local education Acts and local curricula. Local governments proved their leadership abilities during the COVID pandemic by sustaining school education, minimising learning loss of students, and maintaining a high priority on the well-being of students. These positive transformations, such as efficient management and educational decentralisation of public schools, embeds the ideas of New Public Management reforms of the education system (Hood, 1991; Kearney & Hays, 1998).

Party Dominance in School Governance: Negative Roles of Politics

Local governments want to accumulate school-related power such as school management, curriculum development, and resource mobilisation to control school education. Party politicians negatively influences local governments, SMCs, and teacher unions in order to take control of schools. Partisanship has made the schools' environment political. Power exercise in schools has successfully brought ample funding from donors in Nepal, and the country requires global support to progress its education system; as such, schools now are leaning more towards donors and are gradually distancing from communities. Moreover, there are contradictions between donor and Nepali values. The donor countries and organisations such as the World Bank carry capitalist values of societal development and lobby to increase private investment in education (Mundy & Verger, 2015; Regmi, 2017), whereas Nepal's development model follows mixed approaches through the participation of the state, private sectors, and cooperatives (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2015). This is also an example of Global Governance in which developed nations use aid assistance as a political tool to enforce their political vision and influence developing countries (Zürn, 2013).

8.3 Limitations of the Study

It is said that "no study is completely flawless and inclusive of all possible aspects" (Ohman, 2005, para 1). In my research, there are some limitations related to my research process.

The first limitation is my participants' power positioning in Nepali public schools, because of which they may have unwilling to openly present their views. I conducted my research in schools, communities, and municipal offices. In Nepal, there is a top-down hierarchy

among municipal offices (local governments), Education Officers (bureaucracy), Headteachers, teachers, and school staff in schools. Party politics always influence these positions in Nepali school governance (Hamal, 2020; Sharma, 2008). I acknowledged the power dynamics of my participants and tried to act as a neutral researcher. I chose neutral interview venues, did not ask questions about participants' power influences, and kept participants' identities and interviews confidential.

The second limitation is the impact of the COVID pandemic. In Nepal, the first wave of COVID was from March to September 2020. I started my research in the first week of February 2021, when the pandemic's havoc was naturally lower. However, the aftershocks of the first wave still panicked people; many people felt uncomfortable talking with strangers and participating in research interviews. Schools were also cautious in allowing entry of outside people onto their premises for health safety reasons. In order to conduct the interviews, I had to maintain social distancing and wear a face mask while talking with the participants, and COVID did not allow me to spend much time in schools and talk closely with participants. I had to complete my fieldwork in two and half months as the second wave of the COVID pandemic started in the middle of April 2021.

The third limitation is related to the selection of the research participants. Nepali society has a common social perception that males are vocal and more educated, so they perform better in school governance roles (Dhakal, 2021; Sijapati, 2019). In my research, most participants were male and in leadership positions, such as Head Teachers, SMC Chairs, and PTA Chairs. I encouraged women to participate in interviews, saying that their perceptions of my research's agendas would enrich diversity in data. However, out of the 51 participants I initially interacted with only 13 were women, and just six were ready to participate in interviews.

The fourth limitation is the selection of schools in urban, semi-urban, and rural geographic locations in three local government units in Lalitpur, Bagmati Province. I used my judgment as a researcher to select these schools (Rahi, 2017). My criteria for school selection were the schools that provided me with quick consent to conduct this research, the schools were close to my house, and that I relationships with some teachers there. There are 174 public schools and six local government units in Lalitpur, Nepal (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2017).

My small number of schools selected means I cannot generalise the findings to overall school governance in Lalitpur.

8.4 Implications of the Study

My research on school governance has implications for academic scholarship and education policy formulations.

8.4.1 Academic Implications

The research's implications for scholarly communities are from the perspectives of my research's conceptualisation and for triggering debates on the importance of value systems in school governance.

The Research's Conceptual Framework

My narrative research has explored school governance from the perspectives of people's local values and political influences. The research's conceptual framework (see Chapter Three) shows my theoretical footings, methodology and methods, and how I planned to meet the research purpose. The framework has a unique interplay between Eastern Philosophy and New Public Management reforms in school governance to yield better educational outputs. Eastern Philosophy is generated from the cultural and religious practices of Hinduism and Buddhism in countries such as Nepal (see Harrison, 2019; Martins, 2018; Posner, 2017; Raina & Singh, 2018). New Public Management and Global Governance theories are the academic contributions of western worldviews that focus on an organisation's managerial reforms and global partnerships (see Bresser-Pereira, 2009; Joo & Halx, 2022; Salami, 2020; Solesin, 2020; Zürn, 2013). I used the theories from Eastern and Western academics and explored the school governance in Lalitpur, Nepal, which is limited to that completed by Nepali academics. Thus, my expanded conceptual framework has academic implications in education research.

Adding a Meaning to Education Development Discourse

My research has highlighted the strengths of people's value systems in eastern countries such as Nepal. Nepal is considered one of the Land-locked Least Developed countries (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2017a; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2019). The tagging as Least Developed Nation is due to the understanding of poverty, and

human development defined by international donor organisations such as United Nations. Globally, human development is categorised based on longer life expectancy, high per capita income, and education (United Nations Development Programme, 2018).

However, after the COVID pandemic panicked the world in 2019, an understanding of a happy and prosperous life has slightly changed worldwide. The 2020 World Happiness Report mentions, "social connections and the quality of social institutions [...] provide buffers to reduce happiness losses from several life challenges [...] happiness increases more for those with the lowest levels of well-being, thereby reducing inequality" (Helliwell et al., 2020, p. 33). This global paradigm shift acknowledges a strong social environment for human wellness. An acknowledgement of human value is a new discourse of development. The 2020 Human Development Report in the context of COVID, identified human values as "a new narrative" of development (United Nations Development Programme, 2020, p. 114). The report prioritised social and environmental values to prevent the loss of humans and humanity during and after unfavourable world situations, such as the COVID pandemic. In the report, the United Nations defined human development as an integration of capabilities, agency, and values. Capabilities are freedom opportunities to humans in choosing which approach to life they wish to take (Alkire, 2005). Agency is their capacity to take part and influence the decisions they consider best for them. Values are the human choices they desire most to improve their living (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). In this perspective, my research on school governance centralising human values, such as social connectivity, human belongingness and cultural bonding, in Nepali society is a part of academic push to relate education development to the present human happiness and development discourses.

8.4.2 Policy Implications

My research findings have policy implications concerning education decentralisation and the contextualisation of SDGs.

Support for the Institutionalisation of the Education Decentralisation Policies

This research is essential in Nepali education as reforms in educational policies are the current issues in Nepal. After 2015, the country's restructuring into new federal structures has devolved educational-related powers from the central government to the 753 local

governments. The latter are currently engaged in preparing their education Acts; however, the federal education Act has yet to be developed. The decentralisation of educational powers to local governments has been discussed in several plans, policies, and government reports, such as the 2016 Nepal School Sector Development Plan (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016b), the Eight Amendment of the 1971 Education Act in 2016 (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b), the 2017 Local Government Operation Act (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017a), the 2019 National Curriculum Framework for School Education, the 2019 National Education Policy (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2019), the 2020 Fifteenth Plan (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2020a), and the 2021 Education Sector Analysis (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2021).

My research on school governance has discussed the policies mentioned above and school stakeholders' narratives on governance. These documents have discussed the decentralisation of school governance authorities to local governments without defining the explicit roles of communities in managing schools. Local communities and parents are the pillars of school establishment and development in Nepal (Hamal, 2022; Laurent-Olive & Bourn, 2020; Pradhan et al., 2019). My findings on locals' social and cultural values and influences of politics in school governance have implications for acknowledging people's value systems when formulating education policies that are socially and culturally adapted to Nepali education.

Contextualisation of the Sustainable Development Goals

There is a cultural gap between the goals of education that are defined by universal donors and how Nepali society is socially and culturally constructed (Parajuli, 2015). Goal 4 of SDG includes "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2021, p. 34). This Goal focuses on quality learning which is defined through equity and inclusiveness dimensions and connects education with making an individual competitive and employable. In contrast, the Nepali education system is largely process-driven in developing schools as an element of society. Hindu-Buddhist philosophy prioritises the humanisation of individuals and society. People's motives for establishing schools are guided by philanthropic value, which I explain as an inspiration of the Law of Karma to help others selflessly. There is a value of belongingness amongst community people to make schools financially resourceful, take care of school management, and provide moral support. Hindu

cultural values exist as a bonding to connect schools with communities. In schools, people find peace, blessing, and joyfulness in the prayer and worship of the Goddess Saraswati. These activities in Nepali schools show that the country is rich in diverse approaches and processes to strengthen the education system; however, these are unrecorded in the global education discourse. My findings on people's local values in school governance have implications for supporting the contextualisation of SDGs to promote Nepali education more locally.

8.5 Recommendations for Education Reforms

The discussion on the narratives of my participants has led to recommendations regarding school governance and other educational issues in Nepal. Based on the evidence I have collected; I present these recommendations as follows:

8.5.1 Addressing Education Policy Gaps

- **Developing coherent education Policies:** Local governments' education Acts should be prepared in harmony with the national vision and priority of education development. There needs to be policy uniformity in education from the central to the local level of government. At the same time, the forthcoming Education Act of Federal Nepal needs to consider power sharing amongst local governments and communities to develop schools collaboratively. My research has explored four possible risks if elected local government representatives lead SMCs or are decisive in the selection of the SMC Chairs:
 - The school communities will most likely distance themselves from SMC.
 - Schools will lose autonomy in decision-making.
 - If an elected representative such as Ward Chair leads the SMC, their power positioning in schools will be higher than the bureaucrats such as an Education Officer. Efforts are needed to ensure the Chairs are not as powerful as local Education Officers.
 - If the local government nominates an SMC Chair, they will show upward accountability towards the government representatives. SMC Chairs nominated need to take account of both government and school's requirements and needs.
- **Politicisation of Teacher Unions and SMCs:** Every effort should be made to ensure that teachers' identities remain anonymous to protect the security and rights of teachers.

Political parties should not influence school proceedings which should be left to school administrations and SMCs.

8.5.2 Revisiting Education Governance Strategies

- **Openness in the SMC Team:** Every effort should be made to develop an efficient team in the SMC. An efficient SMC can help to raise school's standards in academic, financial, and management aspects and promote school education in an integrated manner.
- **Financially Self-Sustained Schools:** To ensure the financial sustainability of schools, facilities need to be use optimally, endowment funds should be established, and alumni associations which would contribute to the further development of schools need to be promoted.
- **Provision of School Managers:** A school manager should be appointed to oversee the construction of school buildings, deal with contractors, work as a liaison between the school and the local government. Teaching and management works are two distinct aspects of running a school. The Head Teachers should only be involved in teaching and school administration, not infrastructure development of the school.
- **Strengthening Parental Roles:** Parents have limited roles and limited authority to actively contribute to a school's management. School social audit processes are ritualised due to the parents' weak managerial capacity and influence in schools. Parents need training about school meetings, resource mobilisation, social auditing and monitoring, and supervision.

8.5.3 Local Governance of Education

- **Education Officers and their Roles:** There must be close liaison between local government representatives and Education Officers in the preparation of school budgets.
- **Local Curriculum:** An effort should be made to develop local curricula which prioritise local issues and identities. Curriculum reorganisation is required to satisfy the needs of students, parents, and Education Offices in local community settings in Nepal.
- **Donor aid to schools:** Given the increasing demands put on schools to be financially independent there needs to be more intense effort put into using a philanthropic

approach to school development. A more philanthropic approach by donors to funding could reduce pressure on the finances of the government.

8.5.4 Addressing Social and political Constraints in School Governance

- **Social-class Division:** Every effort should be made to ensure that Nepali school managers come from different strata of society. This will ensure the viewpoints of different parts of Nepali communities are represented. The government needs to ensure there is quality education in both private and public schools so that all children, regardless of their social and economic background, can benefit.
- **Patriarchy:** School committees should endeavour to develop strategies to encourage women to be involved in school management. Women's participation in school governance is guided by a tokenistic approach, which means they rarely participate in school meetings and present their views. Although there have to be at least three women in the nine-membered SMC (see Article 12 Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b), men have included the names of women on SMC rolls in order to only meet the inclusion criteria of the government. Patriarchy in school governance is not a legal problem because numerous laws, such as the 2015 Constitution, the 1971 Education Act, and the 2002 Education Regulations, guarantee compulsory female participation in the SMCs. A change in the social mindset is required to acknowledge women's strength in school governance, which takes time and can be done through education. The social actors and structures should create an enabling environment for women to have a similar footing to men in decision-making.
- **Diverse school cultures:** Every effort should be made to ensure that the influence of Eastern Philosophy is retained and further developed within the everyday operation of schools. Schools should always acknowledge religious diversity of all students and give a sense of a tolerant Nepal.

8.6 Scope for Further Research

My narrative research on school governance has signalled that there are further areas to explore on local values, Eastern philosophy, local governance, global support, politics, and narrative inquiry concerning school education in Nepal.

In my research, I have presented the local values of dominant Hindu communities in relation to education governance. People from different castes and creeds and adopting other religions have diverse socio-cultural values, and Nepal consists of 126 caste/ethnic groups in its 30 million population. Besides Hindus, there are other religious groups, such as Buddhists, Muslims, Kiratis, Christians, Sikhs, and Jains (Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Research related to local values in terms of education and citizenship can be conducted for other religious groups and ethnic communities in Nepal. There are research opportunities to explore how female students, *Dalits*, and poor migrants might experience more equitable education, and what changes are needed in current education policies and practices.

I conducted my research using Eastern philosophy as a part of my theoretical framework. This philosophy has a vast horizon of knowledge; for instance, the *Advaita theory* is a path of spiritual discipline that explains nondualism among humans and others. This theory means there is no difference between me and others, and me and nature, as everything is connected (Ganesh & Wesley, 2018). This notion of oneness can explain the makeup of Eastern society and its education system. Research on school governance can be conducted using different theories in Eastern philosophy.

In my narrative research on school governance, the participants were school stakeholders such as parents, teachers and Head Teachers, SMCs and PTA members, Education Officers, and elected representatives. Further research might be conducted to explore the subjective feelings of school students who are the actual beneficiaries of sound school governance. Student voices and values are rarely heard while making educational plans and policies. Similarly, research that narrates the views of donors regarding school governance can be conducted. These diverse participants will elucidate the multiple realities concerning school governance in Nepal.

I identified some other areas in school governance that can be explored. Some of these include the roles of local governments in schooling education, developing local curricula, leadership challenges of Head Teachers, roles of politics in formulating educational policies, envisioining post-SDGs educational policies in Nepal, and a comparative analysis of public and private school governance.

8.7 My Final Thought: Starting a New Journey

Every human's life is full of stories, and people's stories become similar if they stand together for the betterment of their community. In this narrative research, I interviewed forty-three school stakeholders in Lalitpur, Nepal, and explored school governance in the context of peoples' local values and political influences. People's local values strengthen a school's foundation by bringing all stakeholders together with a sense of community and belongingness. These values, represented through SMCs, PTAs, Alumni, and Advisory Committees, include local's philanthropic engagement, collectivist values in school meetings, religious bonding between schools and communities, and some orthodox values such as class division, patriarchy, and local supremacy. Similarly, political influence benefits the upward growth of schools through the power exercises in the SMCs resulting in efficient management teams and local education governance. The pitfalls of political influence in schools include the roles of party politics in school governance structures and increasing dependency on donors. The strengths of people's values and politics must be acknowledged in order to frame educational policies, whereas the drawbacks have to be addressed for better functioning of schools. People's local values and political influences go side by side and have shaped school governance in Nepal. The findings and implications of my research support the development of school governance policies that as key constructs incorporate local values and the exercise of political authority.

In closing, I would like to remember an aspect of Hindu philosophy , “There is a greater life beyond and behind this apparent life; there is a larger world enveloping this apparent world” (Swarup, 1971, p. 8). In Hinduism, the knowledge that exists and claim to know is simply a dot compared with the unknown. I stand with this philosophy and profess that my journey to explore educational issues is continuing and unstoppable. An accomplishment of this PhD research in Aotearoa is a breakthrough in my life to begin an academic journey in the educational development of Nepal. In this research, I retold different stories of my participants and my own experiences and explored the meaning of school governance. I end my research writing with a Nepali proverb which is used to wrap up any storytelling:

Nepali verse:

*“Sunne lai sun ko mala,
Vanne lai ful ko mala.*

*Yo katha Baikuntha Jala,
Vanne belama ma sarasar mukha aajla.”*

Translation:

*“A garland of gold to those who listen,
A garland of flowers for the one who narrates.
May this story reach the heavenly abode of Lord Vishnu,
And may it flow effortlessly from my lip as I tell it.”*

Appendix One

Interview Questions

Regarding the cultural and social values of groups and communities in school governance (related to the Research Question One).

- What was the role your community in establishing the public school?
- What do you think is the difference between the community's support system and the government's support system for the school?
- In what ways, your community support the public school?
- Do you think that the SMC model is helpful for community togetherness?
- In your view, do schools need parents and community support? How have you experienced this?
- Apart from enhancing the academic environment for your children, what motivates you to work for school?
- How have the SMC members shared the responsibilities for school's work?
- Do you consider there any benefits from your involvement on the SMC?
- How are educational issues of the school resolved by the SMC?
- Have you been involved in any voluntary contributions to the school? If yes, how, and why?
- Describe the Saraswoti Puja festival celebration in your school. Why do you think this is un/important?
- How have you experienced women participation in the SMCs?

Regarding the political influences in school governance (related to the Research Question Two).

- How is the SMC formed in your school? Who decides the SMC Chair?
- Describe the decision-making process in the SMC meetings.
- Tell me some details about your experiences as an SMC member.
- Explain the role of the local government in your school?
- What were the roles of school stakeholders to sustain schooling education during the COVID-pandemic?
- Describe the roles of teachers' unions in your school? How are these formed?
- How does your school receive financial and other support from donors?
- How is a donor's support utilised in your school?

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