

Pathways to Teacher Leadership among English as Foreign Language Teachers in Nepal's Public Schools

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Abstract

Studies on teacher leadership have stressed the need for democratic and motivating environment in school, professional development opportunities, reflection and peer observation, and learning environment as preconditions for leadership development. However, teachers are deprived of such professional development scenarios in the context of Nepal. Despite this, some of the teachers have performed exceptionally well in Nepal. Hence, this qualitative study analyzed the lived experience of three English language teachers from Nepal employing activity theory envisioned by Engestrom as a research lens to explore their professional development journey. The study discovered that to become a successful teacher leader, communication and instructional competence is must because it provides visibility of prospective teacher leaders among colleagues and the wider community initially. Further, reflection and sharing among colleagues, we found, were instrumental in the development process of teacher leaders. This article reveals that leadership is the manifestation of co-construction of an individual in a complex ecosystem of learning communities and hence the notion of leadership is emergent and fluid.

Key Words: teacher leadership, activity theory, leadership development framework, teacher development, pathways to teacher leadership

Teacher as a Leader

The notion of teacher leadership is inconsistent as the area is fluid and emerging; however, we find two major pathways to teacher leadership: formal and informal. Formal leadership entails administrative positions like coordinator, department head, subject committee chair, and they are entitled to the payment for additional services, whereas informal leaders try to fill the void in the classroom, plan, initiate, and lead different activities in school. Sometimes teacher leadership may be requested to perform quasi-administrative roles such as communicating messages from the administration, initiating meetings, providing emergency substitute of teachers, and sharing ideas and materials with fellow teachers among others (Baecher, 2012; Anfara & Angelle, 2007; Cheung, Reinhardt, Stone, & Little, 2018). School leadership may consult with teacher leaders on different issues like scheduling, choosing textbooks and instructional materials, setting standards for students' behaviors, designing teacher development programs, evaluating teachers' performance to selecting new teachers and administrators (Cranston, 2000; Watson, 2014; Barth, 2001). Recent development has expanded both traditional dichotomies of confining teacher leaders within classroom boundaries as well as positional roles and has incorporated leadership even at the level of teachers (Anfara & Angelle, 2007). As teacher leaders are expected with a multiplex of responsibility, leadership is also about understanding broader forces shaping their work, resisting domestication, and not being dominated by outside authorities (Gunter, McGregor & Gunter, 2001). Though all the teachers have potential to grow as a leader, only 25% of the total number of the faculty members constituted teacher leaders. If choices are made many teachers prefer teaching to lead (Barth, 2001). Most of the teachers perceive leadership as taking positional roles and exercising power, though classroom teaching itself is a very "complex risk-taking, and highly political setting" (Gunter et al., 2001, p. 27) as they generate and use knowledge and a lot of persuasions and shaping subjectivity is involved.

The characteristic features that define leadership range from humility, trust, healing, empathy, creativity, perseverance, calmness, and desire to serve (Anfara & Angelle, 2007). Most importantly, they prove their ability to perform in the classroom, earn trust and respect of their colleagues, and then rise from their classroom responsibility to take up new responsibilities (Baecher, 2012; Watson, 2014). Some other defining

characteristics lead to the creation of ideas for the enhancement of quality of life of the community in long-term, and include modeling trust and sincerity, confronting barriers, building networks, and nurturing good culture for transformation of the organization as well as larger communities as a whole (Cranston, 2000). Thus, collaboration and cooperation are other defining characteristics of a teacher leader.

Collaboration and communication with colleagues, being open to opportunities, setting learning targets, and meeting students' requirements are the major qualities frequently found in leadership (Anfara & Angelle, 2007; Watson, 2014). Teacher leaders also support their colleagues by giving feedback, providing training, observation, demonstration, and feedback among others. Likewise, they also provide a bridge between faculties and the management by taking up some responsibility in the school.

Teachers should also have expertise in their discipline “including instructional planning and delivery, classroom management and culture, content and content pedagogy, and learning theory” (Wetzler, 2010, p. 29) which enables them to receive respect from their colleagues (Anfara & Angelle, 2007). Further, necessary skills and abilities help them to act as change agents by educating citizens for the future development of the country (Iordanoglou, 2007). These leaders should also set an example and model the way to develop and practice so that other leaders can follow the trail developed. Further, such leaders also create a very encouraging and motivating classroom culture to "capitalize on the excitement and urgency of the big goal to emphasize the connection between hard work and achievement" (Wetzler, 2010, p. 27), and their achievement is assessed regularly and the game plan is adjusted accordingly.

In this framework, the traditional leaders and followers dichotomy does not work (Cranston, 2000). To perform this role effectively and act as change agents, teacher leaders should possess certain skills and abilities (Iordanoglou, 2007). In such cases, teacher leaders can influence beyond school premises as they can also be effective in influencing policy outside their school through publications and presentations; though this kind of contribution is very subtle, it's very reliable (Anfara & Angelle, 2007; Barth, 2001). Such leaders not only positively contribute to and influence the wider community but also at the same time attain personal and professional satisfaction.

Teacher Leadership Development Process

However, to demonstrate such leadership qualities, even teachers require a motivating and supportive environment as well as strong determination and commitment to grow as a leader. Teacher leadership flourishes the most in a democratic environment, and schools can leverage from teacher leaders. Acknowledging and supporting teacher leaders ultimately result in the success of both the principal as well as the school. In such an environment, teachers develop confidence and professionalism, and their sense of agency within the organization may also increase which will ultimately develop a perception that they have the means to accomplish goals and a shared purpose (Anfara & Angelle, 2007). When someone starts taking up leadership roles other seniors give feedback, guidance, support, and encouragement (Watson, 2014; Lieberman, 2015; Baecher, 2012). Such environments can be fertile ground for leadership development for novice teachers.

However, Barth (2001) argues that it's tough to find such schools that perform democratically with a positive environment for leadership development. Most of the schools' meetings are akin to dictatorship where neither teachers nor students can experience freedom when they could take on important school-wide responsibilities and take a huge step in transforming their schools. Very few principals regard that teacher leadership is essential for good health of the school and provide an environment to flourish teacher leadership.

In such environment, teachers work with high enthusiasm. However, they will have to struggle in balancing their leadership roles with classroom obligations and personal life. Further, constraints of time, resources, and unfriendliness of the colleagues due to jealousy and blaming them as willing to hold power and control over others and subsequent ostracism can badly affect them (Anfara & Angelle, 2007; Barth, 2001). Even amidst adversities, those teachers whose commitment to their cause is stronger than difficulties they encounter emerge as a leader irrespective of the hurdles they face.

As leadership is a process, teacher leaders often reflect on their activities and redefine their strategies. They continuously observe other teachers, reflect, and have conversations to refine their practices by adopting the most effective methods (Wetzler, 2010; Anfara & Angelle, 2007). In other words, teacher leaders are reflective practitioners and action researchers who inquire into their practices and try to transform their teaching-learning (Anfara & Angelle 2007; Lieberman & Miller,

2005). This means that if teachers are motivated to participate in these development activities, their growth is inevitable.

From the review of all these researches, we can infer that pathways to teacher leadership are the thriving area in the global context at present; hence, multiple pathways to teacher leadership are mapped. In addition to that, Baecher (2012) by using a survey and in-depth interview of the self-identified teacher leaders explored the nature of the professional development activities they conducted and received, which brought them into the role of teacher leader in their first three years of teaching in the United States. She argues that aspiring teachers should be provided with multiple teacher leadership options such as schools should provide inductions at the beginning of their career for making their transition smooth and make them mentor and cooperate with teachers, and assist them in conducting professional development for colleagues.

Similarly, Wetzler (2010) brings the story of Markita Harris, a Teach for America fellow who joined teaching after being inspired by her friend's story and by observation of her class. She reveals that training opportunities and role models to follow at the beginning of Markarita's career were instrumental in her success. Further, she argues that practical knowledge building and the "foundation of core knowledge is required in several areas, including instructional planning and delivery, classroom management and culture, content and content pedagogy, and learning theory" (p. 29). Her exploration is that community of shared purposes, pre-service and in-service support and development, good learning environment, and reflection of outcomes, and continuous improvement is the key to leadership development. Even Watson (2014) concludes that "collaborating with your colleagues, being open to opportunities and leading in your classroom will allow you to discover your passions and guide your future as a teacher leader" (p. 30). All these pieces of literature on teacher leadership justify the growing interest in pathways to teacher leadership in American and western contexts; however, the area is uncharted territory in the context of Nepal.

One comparative study of headteachers from high and low performing schools by Singh and Allison (2016) explored that leadership understandings and performance of higher-performing school's headteachers aligned with six major leadership qualities like visioning and goal setting, building positive school culture, supporting teachers and students to improve learning, cultivating leadership qualities in others, managing school resources and operations, and leading for continuous

improvement while headteachers from lower-performing schools lack such qualities. With this Allison and Singh concluded that the government should enhance leadership opportunities that promise to increase competitiveness. Also, the selection of headteachers should be made competitive instead of just selecting one from the existing teachers in schools, and the headteachers should be provided with autonomy.

In another qualitative case study of technical schools in Kathmandu, Chauhan (2017) discovered that the nature of the leadership practiced in technical schools in the valley somehow aligns with key leadership theories, approaches, and styles. The most prominent leadership style is behavioral one where top leaders were found to practice autocratic leadership strategies whereas mid-level leaders were democratic. However, the leaders lack transformational and authentic leadership qualities. Though Singh and Allison (2016) and Chauhan (2017) highlight the perception and practice of teacher leadership, pathways to teacher leadership have remained unexplored. Hence, the objective of the study is to explore the lived experiences of English language teachers from Nepal's public schools to fill the gap.

The article presents the process of leadership development through the categorical assumptions of activity theory, such as *subject, object, outcome, rules, community, and division of labor*. It explores the practices and situational responses made during exercising leadership as a headteacher, especially constructive measures of the leadership process by connecting the subject's past, present, and future assumptions and the changes or pathways they embrace during their interaction with their ecosystem. In this line of explanation, the article focuses on both upper levels as well as the lower level of activity theory categories to concentrate on reflective as well as pragmatic approaches to administer and regulate actions. Analysis of transcribed interview data with the lens of activity theory emerged with two major themes: reflection, collaboration and transformation, and network as net-worth. Finally, based on the findings, the article is summed up with a figure of a pathway to teacher leadership development in the context of Nepal.

Activity Theory as a Theoretical Referent

As activity theory has its root in constructivism it primarily believes in the "communicative and socially determined construction of truth" and "renounces monolithic and universal notion of reality" (Gedera & Williams, 2015, p. 163). Engestrom (1999) argues that activity theory

focuses on activeness as opposed to passivity, and the activity it concentrates on is object-oriented and socio-culturally mediated. This notion of activity theory was possible due to the contribution of "proponents of the cultural-historical school who repeatedly point out that communication, often multifaceted, is an inherent aspect of all object-related activities" (Engeström, 1999, p. 24). He further reiterates that by virtue "human activity is endlessly multifaceted, mobile, and rich in variations of content and form. It is perfectly understandable and probably necessary that the theory of activity should reflect that richness and mobility" (p. 20). Additionally, such multivoiced theory should celebrate internal contradictions and debates as essential features of the theory instead of considering them as shortcomings of the system. As the research explores how teachers develop themselves in their interaction with multiple stakeholders, activity theory becomes pertinent.

Engeström's notion of activity theory is constituted of *subject, object, tools, community, rules, and division of labor* (Gedera & Williams, 2015). In the expansive cycle of the activity system, multivoiced formation of the activity system through different participants with multiple viewpoints is reorchestrated. These fundamental societal relations and contradictions potentially lead to change in the activity system. "In this sense, it might be useful to try to look at society more as a multilayered network of interconnected activity systems and less as a pyramidal rigid structure dependent on a single center of power" (Engeström, 1999, p. 36). In other words, the agency is distributed across individuals, institutions, networks, and organizations in activity systems. Additionally, although individuals experience dilemmas, contradictions, and performance shortcomings of the system, solutions are possible only through collective efforts. Through different mediating factors variously located agencies come into spontaneous communication and improvisation of the system's activity. Hence, internal inherent contradictions and shortcomings of the system play the role of catalyst in bringing transformation.

Nevertheless, many novice users of activity theory find the object of an activity system complex as objects of activity need to be understood as a simultaneously given, socially constructed, contested, and emergent phenomenon. Object of activity also provides the basis for theorizing motivation, a point clearly captured by Engeström, when he notes that object of activity is best regarded as a project under construction, moving from potential raw material to a meaningful shape and a result or outcome.

In activity systems, the previous object disappears and a new object is formulated by the contradiction and communication between various components (Blackler, 2009; Taylor et al., 2019). Hence, the theory is applied to see how teachers develop from novices to teacher leaders with their interaction with different *subjects, objects, tools, communities, rules,* and *division of labor* in their activity system. According to Engestrom (1999), these six components mentioned earlier can be summed up into three major steps in analysis using activity theory that includes exploring the viable options of modeling the structure and dynamic relations between the elements of activity systems, taking full account of diversity and multiplicity within the system, and lastly presenting interaction in a hierarchical framework in terms of the influence of different categories.

Participants, Data Generation, and Meaning Making Process

Three English teacher leaders, two male and one female, from public schools in Nepal, particularly Kathmandu valley, are purposively selected as they have demonstrated considerable leadership skills and their leadership journey from teacher to teacher leadership will be of significance. As schools led by all three participants have noticeably performed better and as these teachers are also leading the learning community, their narratives are worth considering.

And to explore the lived experiences, we conducted an in-depth interview and informal conversation with research participants on multiple phases. We audio-recorded the interviews on mobile with the permission of participants and later the recorded interviews were transcribed and translated into English as participants code-switched between Nepali and English languages during the interview. All three face-to-face interviews were completed within half an hours' duration.

Then we conducted tabulation of those transcription, coding, and theme generation as proposed by Josselson (2011) as it was most appropriate to analyze, categorize and develop themes out of collected data. The whole phase of data analysis primarily involved “construction, deconstruction and reconstruction” (p. 224) of stories in short; however, detailed stages of the analysis process were completed in five steps from data transcribing, translating, coding the significant data, categorizing, and ultimately theme development. Finally, compelling extracts from transcribed interviews were used to support the themes developed to address the research issue.

Reflection, Collaboration, and Transformation

Rigorous analysis of the data revealed some commonalities among all the participants as subjects. As outstanding performers, they got several opportunities in teaching from the very initial phases. Further, they were selected in teaching through a nationwide examination of the Teaching Service Commission on a competitive basis. They have an attitude of continuous development and a kind of passion and zeal for education and consequently have excelled in their profession. For example, participant three used to teach students of different levels from primary to master in institutional schools and colleges before he joined a public school. Similarly, participant two has a set record of the first female secondary teacher in the district, has scored high in School Leaving Certificate (SLC), and started teaching right after completion of her intermediate education. As there were no other English teachers available, she had to start teaching at a young age upon the request of the community, though she wanted to finish her education first.

As public schools were competing with institutional schools, public schools had mounting pressure to use English as a medium of instruction; hence, naturally, they had the privilege of being an English teacher. Their privilege further extended the opportunity to conduct different programs in English such as extempore, quizzes, and debates among others which provided visibility among the colleagues. The first opportunity that participant one received in school was to lead a quiz program. He utilized that responsibility in building relationships with colleagues during the formulation of quiz questions and conducting discussions by convincing them all to support him to make the program a grand success.

Similarly, the privilege of being an English teacher is shared by participant three as well. He was offered the school principal's position keeping aside other seniors and master's degree holders because as an English teacher he had the advantage of communication skills. He could conduct different programs, maintain an English environment in school, and lead co-curricular and extracurricular activities among others. As he says, *“During my career in institutional schools, I used to conduct assembly in English, deal politely with everyone so that I had counseling responsibility and gradually I was given Vice Principal and Principal’s position.”* He further reiterates:

When I reflect I feel that I was given the responsibility to lead assembly and other different activities due to my fluent English

communication skills as an English teacher which enhanced my visibility and ultimately paved my way to leadership from Vice Principal to Principal.

Thus communication in English played a pivotal role in attaining the leadership position. Apart from fluency in English and conducting different activities, strategic communication skill is another tool that makes one successful in coordinating and making activity systems functional. Participant one mentioned when he finds his colleagues disappointed with him or complained against him, he does not directly approach them rather he provides them enough cooling time, asks other teachers about their problem, and after a few hours or days talks to them and addresses the issue. Such strategy has helped him avoid any untoward incidents.

Due to his strategic communication style and tactfulness he was able to handle a major crisis that emerged in the school during the exit of a preceding headteacher. Due to a blunder of the former headteacher, the whole community came to school to take action against him. During that time, he handled the situation coordinating with the community, representatives of different political parties, parents, members of the community, and colleagues. His proactive function in settling the issue influenced members of the community, representatives of political parties, colleagues, and members of the school management committee. Similarly, participant two also states that her *“approach to dealing with colleagues is coordination, cooperation, and mutual respect.”* Her tendency of taking everyone’s feedback, opinions, and suggestions before making any crucial decision has been a major strategy due to which her decisions are never questioned. She believes that lack of good communication strategy can be disastrous. As said by Blacker (2009), agency is distributed across distinct activities, individuals and colleagues of an activity system which she understands well and applies this while dealing with colleagues and as a result, she is successful in her endeavors.

Apart from competence in English and strategic communication, another major factor that became instrumental in enhancing opportunity, visibility, and trust is their instructional activities, the additional effort put to enhance quality and good result. Participant three believes:

To be visible and receive appreciation from the community one should be able to give results otherwise they start questioning. So keeping this in mind we have been providing extra-class to

students taking help from alumni. Further, we are also maximizing the use of ICT to make teaching-learning effective.

Further, his emergent insight is that instead of controlling teachers, he should focus on creating development opportunities. So he encourages his teachers for training and development. He has also provided facilitator opportunities to his colleagues in some of the training programs due to which his colleagues are happy with him. Instead of controlling, he is creating opportunities for them to grow, and that has helped both school as well as himself personally. This training and development opportunity that he provided has motivated them positively and its resultant impact is reflected in the teaching-learning environment of the school.

They have not only provided training opportunities to their fellow members but at the same time, they are participating to update themselves. Participant two, for example, grabbed a US embassy-funded 45 days-long training opportunity titled Teaching Excellence Award (TEA Fellow) to visit the US that brought a paradigm shift in her perspective on teaching-learning which resulted in the modernization of the educational environment of the school. After witnessing the environment in the US schools, she connected high-speed internet and equipped her school with a sophisticated computer lab. Even old and traditional teachers were trained and made capable of using computers. She notes:

From the beginning of the lockdown caused by the pandemic, teachers are engaged in different training programs so that we can start online classes soon. Even those teachers lacking social media profiles like Facebook, Twitter, and email addresses are learning to use Zoom, and exploring possibilities to conduct classes during the pandemic. We are also regularly communicating with students. My effort to develop myself through training and networking has also benefited the entire team.

Likewise, participant two received an opportunity to attend a program in the US titled Teaching English for Teenagers (TET) which enabled him to understand the psychology of teenagers and deal with them accordingly. Additionally, he also understood ways of developing language skills in them. He considers this training as a game-changer opportunity. Moreover, he also keeps on providing training to colleagues through Nepal English Language Teachers' Association (NELTA) forum that has given a great milestone in bringing a paradigm shift in the teaching-learning environment. This transformation can be perceived as Blackler (2009) argues that there is transformation of *the object* in activity systems

due to communication and interaction between various components of the activity system where the old *object* disappears and new object emerges.

Thus, with the use of communication competence and optimization of instructional practices through training and self-reflection, these teachers can transform the teaching-learning environment in school. Reflecting on his teaching, participant one admits that his strictness, loudness, rigidity, and corporeal punishment to students had detached him from students. Now he regrets his approach in dealing with students and says, *I should have been soft, polite, and student-friendly so that they could feel comfortable to come to me and ask questions.* Learning from his own mistakes and from different opportunities that he received, he has initiated a sharing and reflection tradition on each Friday that has helped to reinforce the quality of teaching-learning in the school. Similarly, participant two is able to receive a project worth ten million rupees for modernizing the school with a smart classroom, a wide and safe playground, and neat and tidy toilets. The school which looked like a jail in the beginning has turned into a sophisticated school with a well-equipped computer lab and science lab. The teaching-learning environment as an object has completely transformed as Blacker (2009) states that with the communication and contradiction between various components, a new object appears in the activity system. All this achievement and transformation, both physical as well as mental, is possible due to the untiring effort and widespread support of the community of interest.

The analysis of data using Engestrom's notion of activity theory revealed how headteachers as a *subject* in the initial phase of their career and at present with the choice of certain *tools* have impacted the teaching-learning environment as *object* is discussed as presented in figure 1.

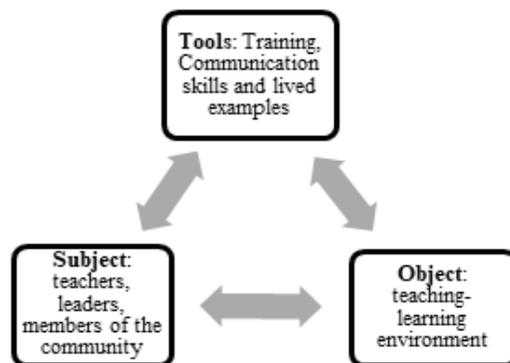


Figure 1: Interaction between upper layer components of activity system

It is evident in their interaction with fellow members of the school that the participants have undergone several rounds of self-reflection and reflection among colleagues as *subject*. They have also learned to utilize lived examples, training, and communication skills as *tools*, and thereby fostered improvement in the teaching-learning environment, interpersonal relation and behavior as *object*. As stated by Engestrom (1999) the multifaceted communication, among different elements of activity systems in object-related activity is evident. And as depicted in figure 2 there has been a two-way influence among these categories. There is also influence among subjects through encouragement and support for the development of their colleagues for the transformation of educational environment in school. During their effort to transform the educational environment in the school, transformation in their leadership style as an outcome is evident.

Network as Net-Worth

As envisioned by Engestrom (1999) a huge influence in the co-construction of an activity system is evident from a larger community where various viewpoints from the expansive cycle are reorchestrated, and these societal relations and interruptions have led to change in the activity systems. In the line of Engestrom, participants are engaged with different professional networking organizations and other communities of mutual interest influencing positive transformation of teaching-learning activity as shown in Figure 2.

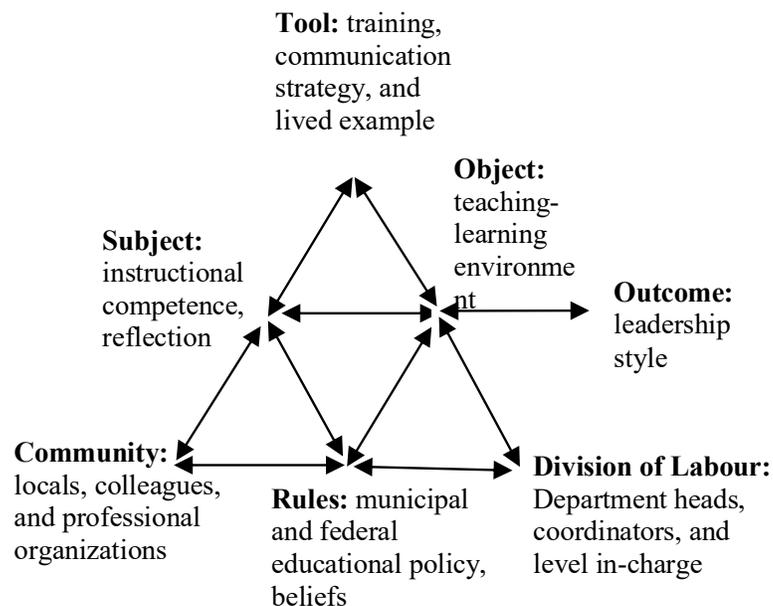


Figure 2: Interaction between different components of activity systems

These organizations and communities range from vertical organizations formed by the municipality to horizontal organizations like different learning communities of colleagues that provide a lot of learning opportunities from reflection and feedback to seminars and training. Reiterating the benefits of different networking organizations, participant three states:

I'm involved in different professional networking organizations that have developed feedback, encouragement, and sharing culture. These organizations range from headteachers network in the municipality, NELTA, district-level teachers union, and Leadership Learning Community among others. These networking organizations also provide training, conference, and seminar opportunities that have brought paradigm shifts in dealing with teachers. I also encourage teachers to participate in such organizations and training opportunities. The network has been a net worth.

Even participant two believes that for development and growth one should come out of his comfort zone and explore different areas. She has joined professional organizations like NELTA that provides her opportunity to participate in conferences and seminars which have been instrumental in enhancing instructional practices. Further, she also joined a forum of female headteachers, the School Management Society, Society of Head Teachers, and Leadership Learning Community, and in some of them she is an executive member. In such forums, they discuss different issues and their practices to explore possibilities to handle them and refine leadership as well as instructional practices. Additionally, international exposure and networking developed dynamism and further possibilities. She states, *“Large network of TEA Fellow also opened up other opportunities. I visited Bangladesh and the Philippines to participate in conferences. Due to all these international exposures, dynamism has developed.”*

Additionally, vertical communities like municipality, school management committee, and local communities have also direct influence in different roles and opportunities for teachers. The community has the privilege to either support or oppose teachers in certain roles. Participant three mentioned that after he joined the school, the local community wanted him to take a lead to see his leadership abilities. The previous headteacher had to offer the position to him as per the request of the community.

As noted by Engestrom (1999) societal relations and internal contradictions in the system cause transformation in the activity system which is also evident in the context of Nepal. Likewise, any interruption or contradiction in the internal community should also be taken into account and considered in the decision-making process for progressive transformation of the activity system. Highlighting the importance of this, participant three reiterates that when opinions of other stakeholders are acknowledged, it's easy to garner support. He feels that it's essential to consider everyone and respect their opinion as all of them are sailing in the same boat. If the boat drowns, all of them will drown. So, with honest effort and communication strategies, he is able to convince his colleagues so far.

All the participants have made a solid effort in bringing their colleagues together though some instances of friction and contradiction are also manifested. By acknowledging the importance of multiple voices and equal participation of all the stakeholders to make decisions sustainable and gain widespread support, they have created different posts and bestowed them with responsibility so that the school runs smoothly. Participant two explains that for smooth functioning and sharing the responsibility, she has created different leadership positions like level in-charges, school in-charge, assistant headteacher, department heads, class teachers, and subject heads to make sure teaching-learning, question-setting, examinations, and other activities meet expected standards. Yet, they also recall friction that occurred due to unilateral decision making and imposition of such decisions upon colleagues. Participant three argued:

In the past, I used to make decisions unilaterally and instruct them to do things. However, as that didn't work well and I didn't find support from colleagues or even some ignored, now I have started making decisions in a group. I get ideas from them. Even small issues like organizing a picnic or educational tour or buying a computer, we discuss in a group. So they take ownership and responsibility.

These contradictions and friction that occurred in the system have led the school towards inclusion and appreciation of multiple voices, eradicated trust deficit among colleagues to some extent, and have positively impacted the working environment. The initial authoritative, aggressive, reactive, and quick decision-making approach has shifted into a very collegial environment accommodating as many voices as possible in

critical decision making. However, some people still keep grumbling. Restating the lines of Mother Teresa, participant three argues that “*some people come as a blessing while others teach lessons.*” He further opines, “*There can be people who make mountains out of molehills, but I don’t answer them instantly.*” He perceives them as lessons, refines himself, and moves ahead taking all the grumbings and dissatisfactions positively.

Apart from that, the traditional mindset of the people, poor infrastructure, lack of proper government policy, unsupportive social environment, parents’ educational awareness, and other socio-cultural aspects erode quality education in public schools in Nepal. Recalling her struggle during initial days of headship, participant two argues that a major challenge she faced during her journey to headship was the patriarchal attitude and traditional mindset of administrators and colleagues. She remembers concerned authority doubting her potential by asking, “*During the time of crisis will you be able to handle school?*” Similarly, “*for some of the male teachers working under the leadership of a female was a kind of humiliation and suffocation. So they created a problem in the beginning.*” However, she answered them all through her performance, so now everything is intact. Similarly, some senior teachers’ denial to change has posed a great challenge in smooth functioning of the school. They lack computer skills as well as English communication skills. Their grumbling attitude and unwillingness to grow have posed a threat to their effort to enhance quality in school. Some teachers deny reflecting on their performance and their communication skills but simply blame students for their inability.

Likewise, poor infrastructure and lack of ownership of school premises are other hurdles in improving the teaching-learning environment in most of the public schools; so, school headteachers with the collaboration of their colleagues, community, and other stakeholders are crowd-funding and receiving aid from donor agencies for infrastructure development. Participant two recalls her initial days:

After the devastating earthquake of 2015, maintaining a physical facility was my major challenge. Further, the challenge was added by the lack of registration of land in the school's name so that we could not apply for big donors like ADB or World Bank who could provide a large amount of money for reconstruction. So I had to collect money from different small donors in different phases and make building phase-wise accordingly.

Thus, modernization of infrastructure and advancement of teaching-learning environment was possible due to the unified effort of all the stakeholders. Improvement of quality is substantiated by increasing number of students and even city dwellers, particularly the chairperson of the ward, admitting his daughter in the public school. Internal contradictions and challenges have been instrumental to the enhancement of the educational environment. Honesty, commitment, self-restraint, and professional ethics displayed by the participants and collaborative effort of municipality, community, and other stakeholders have made the transformation possible.

Pathways to Teacher Leadership and its Implication

During this process of transformation of three different schools' teaching-learning environment, there is co-construction of leadership through the interaction of multiple categories of an activity system as an *outcome* in Engestrom's formulation. Therefore, the whole interaction process of an activity system itself is the process of leadership development or a leadership development framework in an EFL context like Nepal.

As represented in Figure 3, a preliminary requirement for leadership development is continuous learning attitude in prospective leaders which is also reflected in better communication skills and instructional competence that provides visibility among colleagues and the community. All the research participants are intrinsically motivated to learn. For example, participants two and three as outstanding performers in different levels have untiring learning attitudes and passion for knowledge which has made it possible to diligently take numerous degrees and engage in diverse training and seminars.

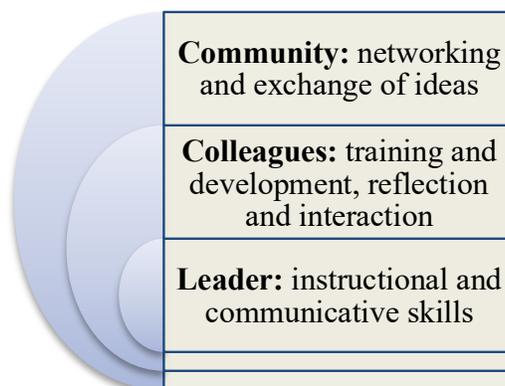


Figure 3: Leadership development process in Nepali context

This zeal for education that leads one to employ different tools can be another contributing factor to leadership development. For instance, participant one believes that the opportunity that he received for participating in a TET training program in the US was a milestone for his leadership development. Such tools bear potential not only for self-development but at the same time for the development of colleagues. For example, participant three believes that instead of monitoring and controlling colleagues, headteachers can provide training and other multiple development opportunities that keep them contented and motivated.

Next, continuous interaction and reflection among colleagues to exchange ideas and navigate challenges further sharpen their competence in diverse areas. They can reflect on their practices and learn from the best practices among their colleagues. Considering the importance of this, participant one has initiated sharing and reflection sessions on Fridays being inspired by such diverse opportunities he received, which has contributed to strengthening teaching-learning quality as well as his leadership skills.

Finally, both vertical communities like society, the municipality, and the school management committee as well as horizontal communities like NELTA and Head Teachers Forum among many influence leadership in multiple ways. Horizontal communities are the best platforms for the exchange of ideas through seminars and conferences which enables them to inherit best practices and keep updated with the latest developments in their discipline. This further opens up networking and development possibilities.

Summing up, leadership is an inter-subjective, emergent and fluid concept, and a relentless process of interaction with multiple stakeholders in its ecosystem. However, the major and immediate influencers of the leadership development process are leaders' fervor for knowledge and continuous learning attitude, training and development opportunities, immediate community of colleagues, and a larger community. All these elements of an ecosystem interact constantly with potential to influence each other and grow altogether as presented in figure 3. The study implies that a proper learning environment in the early phase, culture of reflection and interaction among peers, training and development opportunities from the school, and construction of a networking platform for teachers should be created for professional development and the development of teacher leadership. Though the study is limited to three participants from Nepal,

pathways to teacher leadership developed in the article can be equally applicable to other similar contexts.

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