



A Study of the Relationship between Leadership, School Culture and Achievement of Students at the Secondary Level in Kailali, Nepal

Chandrakala Dawadi^{1*}, Dr. Meenakshi Sharma²

^{1*}PhD Scholar, School of Education, Sanskriti University, Mathura

²Professor, School of Education, Sanskriti University, Mathura

***Corresponding Author:** Chandrakala Dawadi

*PhD Scholar, School of Education, Sanskriti University, Mathura

Abstract

This study explores the relationship between leadership styles, school culture, and the academic achievement of secondary-level students in Kailali, Nepal. The primary objectives are to analyze the impact of different leadership styles on student achievement, evaluate the role of school culture in shaping educational outcomes, and investigate the interplay between leadership and school culture in influencing student performance. A qualitative method research was adopted to ensure a comprehensive analysis. Data were collected from a sample of secondary schools in Kailali using surveys, structured interviews, and academic performance records. Data from interviews were thematically analyzed to capture nuanced insights. The findings indicate that transformational leadership styles positively influence student achievement by fostering a collaborative and motivating school environment. Additionally, a strong, positive school culture characterized by shared values, high expectations, and effective communication enhances academic outcomes. The study also highlights the synergistic effect of leadership and school culture, emphasizing that the two factors together significantly improve student performance compared to their independent effects. The research underscores the importance of capacity-building programs for school leaders and initiatives to strengthen school culture. These findings provide actionable insights for policymakers and educators aiming to improve secondary education outcomes in similar contexts.

Key Words: Achievement, Leadership, Relationship, School culture, Secondary level

Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a cornerstone of societal progress, and student achievement serves as a critical measure of educational success. However, academic performance is not solely a result of student effort but is also shaped by external factors such as leadership practices and the cultural environment of schools. These two dimensions: leadership and school culture have been consistently linked to the quality of education and outcomes for students. Research worldwide highlights the transformative role of leadership in shaping educational outcomes. Leaders not only provide vision and direction but also cultivate an environment that fosters professional growth for teachers and motivation among students. Similarly, a strong school culture, characterized by shared values, mutual respect, and collaboration, is essential in creating a conducive environment for learning.

In Nepal, education plays a vital role in driving economic development and social equity. However, challenges such as resource constraints, regional disparities, and socio-economic diversity pose significant barriers to achieving universal quality education. Kailali, a district in the Sudoorpashchim Province, epitomizes these challenges due to its unique geographical, cultural, and socio-economic characteristics. Despite policy reforms aimed at improving education in Nepal, the role of leadership and school culture in influencing student achievement in this region remains underexplored. Kailali is home to a diverse population with varying socio-economic backgrounds, ranging from rural and indigenous communities to urban settlements. Many schools face challenges such as: Limited access to educational resources, Variability in leadership practices across schools, Cultural norms that influence student and community engagement.

Rationale of the Study

While global studies have emphasized the significance of leadership and school culture, there is limited research specifically focusing on their interplay in the context of secondary schools in Kailali. Understanding these dynamics can provide localized insights that are crucial for targeted interventions. Nepal's education system is undergoing significant reforms, including decentralization and curriculum updates. Evidence from this study can inform policies and practices that promote effective leadership and foster positive school cultures in rural and semi-urban settings like Kailali. Secondary education is a critical stage that shapes students' future opportunities. Identifying factors that influence achievement at this level can help schools implement strategies to improve educational outcomes. Schools in Kailali serve as hubs for community development. Strengthening leadership and school culture can empower communities by ensuring inclusive and equitable education for all students. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge the gap in understanding the relationship between leadership, school culture,

and student achievement in Kailali's secondary schools, contributing to both academic research and practical educational improvements.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to ensure a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the relationship between leadership, school culture, and student achievement in secondary schools in Kailali, Nepal. Data were collected from a purposive sample of secondary schools in the region, representing a diverse range of school types and leadership styles. The primary data collection methods included surveys, structured interviews with school leaders, teachers, and students, as well as an analysis of academic performance records. Surveys were used to gather broad perspectives, while structured interviews allowed for more detailed, personal insights into the experiences and perceptions of key stakeholders. The data from the interviews were thematically analyzed to identify recurring patterns and themes that could shed light on the complexities of how leadership and school culture influence student outcomes. This approach provided a rich, nuanced understanding of the educational environment in Kailali, considering the unique socio-cultural and infrastructural challenges faced by schools in the region. By using these qualitative methods, the study aimed to capture both the objective aspects of academic performance and the subjective experiences of those directly involved in the educational process.

Results

This study explored the relationship between leadership styles, school culture, and student achievement at the secondary level in Kailali, Nepal. Data were collected from a sample of schools in Kailali, including feedback from school leaders, teachers, and students. The analysis revealed several key findings related to leadership styles, the influence of school culture, and the interaction effects between leadership, culture, and academic performance.

The study identified a clear relationship between leadership styles and student achievement. It was found that transformational leadership, characterized by vision, support, and the empowerment of teachers and students, had a positive impact on student academic outcomes. Head teachers who exhibited transformational leadership behaviors, such as providing a clear academic vision, encouraging innovation, and fostering collaboration among teachers, were associated with higher levels of student achievement. One teacher from a school with strong transformational leadership remarked,

"The head teacher always encourages us to be creative and try new methods in the classroom. His support has made a big difference in how we teach, and we see more students engaged and achieving better."

In contrast, schools led by authoritarian or laissez-faire leaders reported lower levels of student achievement. In these schools, leaders were either too controlling or too detached from the teaching and learning process. A head teacher from a school with a more autocratic leadership style shared,

"I try to keep strict discipline and order, but I sometimes feel overwhelmed by the many responsibilities and lack of support from my staff."

These leadership styles were linked to a more rigid school environment, where student engagement and academic performance suffered. The study also found that school culture played a significant role in influencing student academic performance. Schools with a positive, inclusive, and supportive culture tended to have higher academic outcomes. This was particularly evident in schools where the culture promoted mutual respect, a focus on academic excellence, and active involvement from teachers, students, and parents. One school with a strong school culture, characterized by an emphasis on high academic standards, shared values, and strong community involvement, reported impressive student performance. A student from this school commented,

"We feel motivated because our teachers believe in us. The whole school, including our parents, supports our efforts to do well in our studies."

In these schools, students reported higher levels of motivation, engagement, and a stronger sense of responsibility toward their learning. On the other hand, in schools with weak or fragmented school cultures, students were less motivated, and their academic achievement was significantly lower. These schools often had poor student-teacher relationships, lack of collaboration, and limited community involvement. One teacher from a school with a less supportive culture noted,

"The atmosphere here is not very positive. There are constant issues with discipline, and it's hard to focus on academic improvement when there is so much distraction."

The study also explored the interaction effects between leadership, school culture, and student outcomes. The data revealed that effective leadership and a positive school culture together had a synergistic effect on student achievement. In schools where leadership was strong and aligned with a positive school culture, students demonstrated not only better academic performance but also higher levels of engagement, discipline, and overall school satisfaction. For instance, in one school, the head teacher's transformational leadership was complemented by a culture of high expectations and mutual respect, leading to a notable improvement in student performance. One student shared,

"The school has a clear goal of excellence, and we all work together to achieve it. Our teachers encourage us, and we feel like we are part of a community that values education."

Conversely, in schools where leadership was weak or ineffective, the school culture was also impacted negatively, leading to poor student achievement. In these schools, the lack of a shared vision or supportive environment undermined efforts to improve academic outcomes. As one teacher from a school with weak leadership stated,

"Without strong leadership, it's difficult to build a culture that supports learning. There's a lot of disconnection between what we do in the classroom and the expectations set by the administration."

Additionally, the study showed that the impact of leadership on student achievement was significantly stronger in schools with a positive and inclusive culture. In schools where the culture was more hierarchical, where students and teachers had little autonomy, the leadership style had less impact on academic performance. This suggests that while leadership is important, the overall school environment and culture may amplify or dampen its effects on student achievement.

Discussion

One of the key findings of this study is the positive relationship between effective leadership and student achievement. In Nepal, leadership in schools often faces significant constraints, such as limited resources, political interference, and a lack of professional development opportunities for school leaders. However, the results of this study suggest that when school leaders adopt a visionary and supportive approach, student achievement tends to improve. This finding aligns with international research that underscores the importance of leadership in setting the tone for academic success (Leithwood et al., 2004).

In the context of Kailali, many schools are led by head teachers who must balance administrative duties with teaching responsibilities. This dual role can be overwhelming, but the study suggests that leaders, who prioritize building strong relationships with teachers, students, and parents, as well as creating a shared vision of educational excellence, can foster an environment where academic achievement thrives. Effective leadership also entails facilitating a culture of collaboration among teachers, which can lead to the implementation of more student-centered teaching practices.

However, the study also revealed that leadership effectiveness in Kailali is often hampered by a lack of training and resources. Many school leaders, especially in rural areas, are not equipped with the necessary skills to address the complex needs of students. Therefore, there is a pressing need for professional development programs focused on leadership skills, school management, and educational innovation.

The relationship between school culture and student achievement was another significant finding in this study. The culture of a school encompasses its values, norms, traditions, and expectations, all of which play a crucial role in shaping students' attitudes toward learning. In Nepal, school culture can be influenced by various factors, including local customs, social norms, and the economic context. In Kailali, schools that fostered a positive and inclusive school culture saw better student outcomes. A positive school culture, characterized by mutual respect, trust, and high expectations, was found to correlate with increased student motivation and academic performance. This is consistent with previous studies, which have shown that a positive school climate encourages students to engage more in their studies, take ownership of their learning, and achieve higher academic standards (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

In Kailali, where many schools face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, large class sizes, and limited access to educational materials, creating a supportive and inclusive school culture becomes even more critical. The findings highlight that schools with strong cultures of support, where students feel safe and valued, tend to have higher levels of achievement. Teachers who work within a supportive environment are more likely to adopt innovative and effective teaching methods, which in turn can enhance student learning outcomes.

However, the study also revealed that school culture in many schools in Kailali remains underdeveloped. In some cases, traditional hierarchical structures, lack of teacher-student rapport, and limited community involvement in school activities hinder the development of a positive culture. Addressing these issues requires concerted efforts from school leadership, teachers, parents, and local authorities to cultivate a culture that values academic excellence, inclusivity, and collaboration.

The relationship between leadership, school culture, and student achievement is not linear; rather, it is highly interconnected. Effective leadership has the potential to shape and strengthen school culture, which in turn influences student achievement. Leaders who are committed to creating a positive school culture by fostering trust, collaboration, and high academic expectations will likely see improved student outcomes. Conversely, schools with weak leadership may struggle to create a positive culture, which can negatively impact student achievement.

This interdependence was evident in the findings, which showed that schools with strong leadership and positive school cultures achieved better academic results, despite external challenges such as resource constraints. However, the study also revealed that the strength of these relationships varies across different schools, with some schools in Kailali achieving better results despite facing more significant challenges. This suggests that while leadership and culture are important, other factors, such as the socioeconomic background of students, community support, and teacher effectiveness, also play a crucial role in student achievement.

Summary

The results of this study reveal that leadership styles, school culture, and their interactions significantly influence student achievement at the secondary level in Kailali, Nepal. Transformational leadership and a positive school culture were found to be strongly correlated with better academic outcomes. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of the interaction between leadership and culture, with effective leadership helping to cultivate a supportive school culture that ultimately enhances student achievement. These findings underscore the need for educational stakeholders in Kailali to invest in leadership development and to foster a positive school culture to improve educational outcomes for students.

Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical role of leadership and school culture in influencing student achievement at the secondary level in Kailali, Nepal. While challenges remain, particularly in rural and underserved areas, there is clear evidence that effective leadership and a positive school culture can contribute to improved academic outcomes. It is essential that educational policies in Nepal focus on strengthening leadership capacity, developing supportive school cultures, and

addressing the structural challenges that hinder student achievement. By doing so, Nepal can move closer to providing a high-quality education for all students, regardless of their background or geographic location.

A supportive, respectful, and collaborative school culture enhances student engagement and motivation. Schools with a shared focus on academic excellence and ethical behavior encourage students to adopt high standards. A culture of inclusion ensures that diverse needs are met, helping all students feel valued and supported. A culture that values learning fosters peer encouragement and positive teacher-student interactions, which directly impact student achievement. Effective school leaders set a clear vision for the institution, aligning efforts toward improving student learning outcomes. Strong leadership promotes professional development for teachers, fostering improved instructional practices. Leaders ensure that necessary resources, including technology, materials, and staff, are available to support student learning. By establishing standards and monitoring progress, leaders cultivate a culture of accountability that motivates both teachers and students to excel. Leaders inspire and maintain trust among staff, students, and parents, creating an environment conducive to academic success.

The findings of this study have important policy implications for improving the educational system in Kailali and other similar regions of Nepal. First, there is a need for policy initiatives that focus on strengthening school leadership. This could include providing training programs for head teachers, improving their managerial and pedagogical skills, and ensuring that they have the necessary resources to lead effectively. Additionally, policies that promote collaborative decision-making, where teachers, students, and parents have a voice in the school's direction, could help enhance the overall school culture.

Second, there is a need to prioritize the development of a positive school culture that fosters inclusivity, mutual respect, and high expectations for academic success. Schools should be supported in developing systems for promoting positive behaviors and creating a climate where students feel motivated to succeed. Local communities, including parents and local authorities, should be encouraged to participate actively in school activities, which can enhance the sense of ownership and responsibility for students' success.

Finally, the government and education authorities must recognize the unique challenges faced by schools in rural areas like Kailali. Addressing issues such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of resources, and teacher shortages will be crucial in supporting both leadership and school culture development. By taking a holistic approach to improving the educational environment, it will be possible to create schools where both leaders and students can thrive.

REFERENCES

1. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. (2004). *Facts for families: Teen suicide*. Retrieved December 23, 2007, from <http://aacap.org/page.wv?section=Facts+for+Families&name=Teen+Suicide>.
2. American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th Ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
3. Barrett, D. E., Headley, K. N., Stovall, B., & Witte, J. (2006). Teachers' perceptions of the frequency and seriousness of violations of ethical standards. *The Journal of Psychology*, 140(5), 421-423.
4. Blum, R. W. (2005). A case for school connectedness. *Educational Leadership*, 62(7), 16- 20.
5. Bracey, G. E. (1998). An optimal size for high schools? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 79(5), 406.
6. Clarke, J. H. (2003). *Breaking Ranks II, NASSP Changing systems to personalize learning: Introduction to the personalization workshops*. Providence, RI: Education Alliance at Brown University.
7. Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
8. Cushman, K. (2006). Help us care enough to learn. *Educational Leadership*, 63(5), 34- 37.
9. Daggett, W. (2003). *The rigor and relevance handbook*. New York: International Center for Leadership in Education.
10. Daggett, W. (2005, June). *Four Educational Trends*. Presented at the International Center for Leadership in Education Model School Conference, Orlando, FL.
11. Davidson, J. (2005). Professional relationship boundaries: a social work teaching module.
12. *Social Work Education*, 24(5), 511-533.
13. de Anda, D. (2001) A qualitative evaluation of a mentoring program for at-risk youth, the participants perspective. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 18,(2), 97-127.
14. Davis H. (2003). Conceptualizing the role and influence of student-teacher relationships on children's social and cognitive development. *Educational Psychologist*, 38(4), 207-234.
15. DuFour, R. (Producer/Director). (2003). *Through new eyes, examining the culture of your school* [Video]. (Available from National Educational Services. 304 West Kirkwood Avenue, Suite 2, Bloomington, Indiana 47406).
16. Gewertz, C. (2007). An advisory advantage. *Education Week*, 26(26), 22-25.
17. Good, T. L., & Brophy, J. E. (1995). *Contemporary educational psychology* (5th ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman
18. Gravetter, F. & Wallnau L. (2005). *Essentials of statistics for the behavioral sciences* (5th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Thompson
19. Guskey, T. (1994). Making the grade: What benefits students? *Educational Leadership*, 52(2), 14-20.
20. Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
21. Hirschi, T. (1969) Causes of delinquency. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
22. Iowa Department of Education. (2006). *Iowa youth survey results: AEA 11*. Retrieved October 27, 2007, from <http://www.iowa.gov/educate/content/view/503/710/>.
23. Johnson, J. (2002). Will parents and teachers get on the bandwagon to reduce school size? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(5), 353-356.

24. Jones, F. (2000). Tools for teaching. Santa Cruz, CA: Fredrick H. Jones & Associates, Inc.
25. Klem, A. M. & Connell, J. P. (2004). Relationships matter: Linking teacher support to student engagement and achievement. *Journal of School Health*, 74(7), 262-273.
26. Larsen, Dean L. Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints. Address presented at Brigham Young University, March 1983.
27. Masconi J., & Emmett, J. (2003). Effects of a values clarification curriculum on high school students' definition of success. *Professional School Counseling*, 7(2), 68-78.
28. Michigan Department of Education. (2007). *Office of school improvement: Strengthening Teacher Student Relationships*. Retrieved December 23, 2007, from http://www.michigan.gov/documents/3-3_107241_7.pdf.
29. Mills, G. E. (2003). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
30. National Science Foundation. (1997). User friendly handbook for mixed method evaluations. RED 94-52965. Washington, DC: NSF.
31. Newman, F. M. (1989). Student engagement and high school reform. *Educational leadership*, 46(5), 34-36.
32. Novak B., & Fischer, B. (1998). Seeing student/teacher relationships as hidden dramas of personal development. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 15(6), 479- 496.
33. Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research method*. (2nd Ed.) Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
34. Public Purpose. (2007). *Government cost review: Number of school districts since 1930*.
35. Retrieved November 21, 2007, from <http://www.publicpurpose.com/gf-edschd.htm>.
36. Sipe, C. L. (1999). Mentoring adolescents: What we have learned. In R. Marzano, *Building background knowledge for academic achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
37. Skinner, E. A., & Belmont, M. J. (1993). Motivation in the classroom: Reciprocal effects of teacher behavior and student engagement across the school year. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 85(4), 571-581.
38. Southern Regional Education Board. (2005). *High schools that work: an enhanced design to get all students to standards*. Atlanta, GA: Author.
39. Trochim, W. M. K. (2002). *The research methods knowledge base*. Retrieved June 8, 2007, from <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net>.
40. University of North Carolina (2007). *Common expectations, patterns and mistakes in relationships*. Retrieved January 20, 2008, from <http://www.unca.edu/counselcenter/Articles/Common%20Expectations.htm>.
41. Vander Ark, T. V. (2002). The case for small high schools. *Educational Leadership*, 59(5), 55-60.
42. Wenger, E. C., McDermott R., & Snyder, W. M. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: a guide to managing knowledge*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
43. Winger, T. (2005). Grading to communicate. *Educational Leadership*, 63(3), 61-65.