Multi-Stakeholder Perspectives on Effective and Sustainable School Leadership for Holistic Student Development: A Focus Group Study

[1]Sahaj Kumar Ghale, [2]Dr. Tejal Shah

[1]PhD Scholar, Faculty of Management Studies, Parul University, Waghodia,Vadodara, Gujarat, 391760, India & Founder & CEO, Doctor Researcher Pvt. Ltd.

[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Management Studies, Parul Institute of Management and Research, Faculty of Management Studies, Parul University, Waghodia,Vadodara, Gujarat, 391760, India

Corresponding Authors: Email: tejal.shah@paruluniversity.ac.in/ nepaliskg@gmail.com

Abstract: Objectives: This study investigated collectively the perspectives of three stakeholders (teachers, guardians/ parents, and students) on aspects of sustainable leadership practice, communication and engagement, vision, culture, and environment, support and resources, and challenges and recommendation to holistic students development at a private secondary school in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Method: The study is a qualitative case study that utilized focus groups with teachers, parents, and students from a private school in Kathmandu, Nepal. Data were analyzed thematically to identify convergent and divergent views, and the researcher developed rigor to the study through triangulating stakeholders.

Results: From the analysis of the data, five major themes took shape: sustainable leadership practice, communication and engagement, vision, culture, and environment, support and resources, and challenges and recommendation. Stakeholders identified sustainable leadership beyond the academic features of the school, identifying transparency, collaboration, and the wellbeing of students in the forefront. Students articulated emotional supports and their voice as top priorities; guardians and parents preferred trust in a partnership with the school; and staff valued site specific shared leadership and professional development.

Conclusions: The evidence suggests the potential for a model of contextualized holistic leadership that combines aspects of instructional leadership, transformational leadership and distributed leadership, within a framework of cultural humility, relational trust, and ethics, to balance both academic excellence and socio-emotional wellbeing at the school level.

Keywords: Holistic student development, sustainable school leadership, stakeholders' perspective, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, instructional leadership, Nepal.

1. Introduction

Background

The current status of global education is largely framed in terms of supporting the positive holistic development of students, including social-emotional, ethical, and physical wellbeing, rather than just traditional academic outcomes (Assefa, 2024). Research shows that non-academic/soft skills, such as socio-emotional learning and resilience, are equally (or more) powerful in predicting student success in long-term (Mehrad et al., 2024). Thus, the role of school leadership has shifted to be an integral part of intentionally growing the 'overall' school environment and conditions that will support such development (Piala et al., 2024).

Theoretical models have been established to identify the infrastructures that leadership facilitates to support this work. Instructional leadership directly supports teachers and learning about curriculum quality (Gading, 2024). Unlike instructional leadership, transformational leadership focuses on

inspiring others to create a collective action and culture with shared vision and motivation (Mburu et al., 2023). Additionally, distributed leadership, which actively encourages teamwork and shared ownership between staff and the community, is essential to establishing a sustainable whole-school approach to cultural support (Murphy & Brennan, 2022). However, while these approaches may be effective, they cannot do so in a vacuum, rather their effectiveness is socially constructed and understood by the different stakeholders who have different, and sometimes conflicting, expectations (Gading, 2024; Mburu et al., 2023; Murphy & Brennan, 2022). For instance, teachers may value their professional autonomy, parents may prioritize communication and transparency, and students may frequently underline the need for a welcoming and supportive school climate and these priorities may differ depending on cultural context (Gramaxo et al., 2023; Juvonen & Toom, 2023; Ramos et al., 2023).

However, despite this valuable understanding, there are substantial and highly interrelated fissures in the school leadership literature. A focus of the literature remains intensely focused on narrow academic outcomes and less about the ways in which leadership makes a contribution to fundamental student competencies, such as creativity, ethical reasoning, and wellbeing (Karakose et al., 2023). Additionally, the empirical burden is heavily-weighted to high-income Western nations which limits generalizability and relevance into lower-income and middle-income contexts with varying resources and social risk (Arar & Orucu, 2022). Most importantly for the current study, the circumstances of key beneficiaries of school leadership, namely students, academic and non-academic staff, and guardians and parents, are grossly absent—creating a significant gap between theoretical models and the lived experiences of the school community.

This study intends to address some of these glaring omissions by using focus groups with teachers, parents, and students to engage theoretical frameworks of leadership, and pair these with everyday experiences and factors of social demand. The goal will be to reframe leadership effectiveness beyond test scores and provide rich context-grounded and evidence-based anticipations for how to develop the child whole.

Literature Review

Sufficient research evidence now exists to affirm the significance of educational leadership on student achievement. Prior to this, research explored how leadership impacts teaching and learning outcomes at the classroom level (ÖzdGmR et al., 2023). Recently however, research has focused on how leadership impacts social and emotional learning, equitable and holistic well-being, and coherences and alignment of practice in these spaces for holistic student wellbeing (Mustari & Nurhayati, 2024). There are three types/models. Instructional leadership provides a focus on curricular and pedagogical aspects of education, which are fundamental to academic achievement and establishing a structural base for a holistic program (Gading, 2024). Transformational leadership should be evaluated based on actionable vision and its motivational factors to create an environment that prioritizes inclusivity. These are essential factors of socio-emotional wellbeing (Mburu et al., 2023). Lastly, distributed leadership focuses on the civic community sponsorship of students but has a structural ambiguity (Murphy & Brennan, 2022).

The body of research reflects agreement on the significance of leadership but there are also important tensions related to definitions of leadership. For example, instructional leadership has been criticized as being too narrow (Shaked, 2021), it is clear that transformational leadership is indirect and contextual (Alzoraiki et al., 2024), and it is possible that the concept of distributed leadership is unclear in relation to role or agency (Mifsud, 2024). Nevertheless, there are common themes of these criticisms that each leadership model is partial and needs more complex integrative and responsive leadership framework that is responsive to context, all the while signifying importance of leadership. To account for this, this study explores which practices of engaging educational leaders across the

three models are perceived as part of inclusive human practices in learning to teach, and how these practices are contextualized.

Effectiveness is contextual to a society and a context, which defines how effectiveness manifests through the motives of different stakeholders' contexts (e.g., teachers might prioritize ease in the use of a digital tool, parents might prioritize communication, while students perhaps might prioritize facilitation) across national contexts (Gramaxo et al., 2023; Juvonen & Toom, 2023; Ramos et al., 2023). However, there still exists a large gap whereby the voices of students and parents or staff continue to be marginalized or omitted, which creates large discrepancies in the literature and lived experience around theory.

This study set out to fill that gap. By using focus groups, it captures the missing voices of parents, staff and students to build a multi-stakeholder understanding of leadership sustainability and effectiveness. The aim is to re-conceptualize leadership beyond test scores and develop evidence-informed knowledge and practice for development programs and policy geared to support whole child development.

Research Gap

Most existing leadership literature focuses on academic-related outcomes, ignoring the ethical and creative aspects, as well as dimensions of wellbeing, of a more holistic approach to student development (S Groenewald et al., 2024). While some of the dominant models have offered some insights—e.g., instructional (narrow), transformational (indirect), and distributed (role ambiguity)—there has yet to be an attempt to combine these models in order to pursue holistic ends. Equally concerning is that the evidence base is geographically narrow in nature and based primarily (and largely unexamined) on high-income contexts thus failing to express approaches to meet the diverse expectations in many under-researched areas (Arar & Orucu, 2022). More critically, the voices of two groups of key educational stakeholders, specifically students and parents themselves, have been systematically overlooked producing a detachment to theory which undermines the lived experience of these components of school ecosystems. This study addresses these gaps directly - using a lens of multi-stakeholder perspectives to consider what specific sustainable leadership practices and culture of supports and resources are seen to be most effective for supporting holistic student development.

Objectives: i. To investigate the ways stakeholders view the value of sustainable leadership practices, modes of communication, and engagement strategies that support students' holistic development. ii. To explore the resources, supports and culture of the school that stakeholders believe create the most potent enabling conditions for staff, parents and students to thrive. iii. To reflect on the challenges stakeholders experience when trying to support students and note their suggestions for school leadership to help address these challenges.

2. Methods
Research Design

Rather than to measure numerically this research use qualitative design (Aydogdu, 2023). This research employed a qualitative design to examine the rich diversity of perspectives of staff, parents, and students about effective and sustainable school leadership for holistic student development. This means exploring how they experience school leadership as effective (or ineffective) and sustainable (or unsustainable) school leadership practice, communication, resources, and associated challenges. In terms of epistemology, it was exploratory and guided by interpretivism, making the assumption that reality is socially constructed and experiences help reveal multilayered meaning about complex social realities (Paudel, 2024). Each of the perceptions and experiences of school leadership was understood in relation to the context in which each group has been situated, warranting a deeper exploration of their values, beliefs, and lived experiences.

The methodology involved separate focus group discussions with staff, parents, and students. This design enables each group to elicit their unique perspectives while establishing an interactional space for the co-construction of shared understanding within their stakeholder group (Brohman et al., 2024), and across groups for comparative analysis. The research used thematic analysis to derive shared and divergent patterns across and within each of these groups (Unlu & Kotonen, 2024). Thus, it is a qualitative, interpretivist design that prioritizes foundational depth of understanding to reveal the experience of situational leadership, and focuses attention on the underrepresented voices to explore the complex, socio-political nature of effective leadership for holistic student development and construct a nuanced, multi-voiced framework for how contexts foster holistic student development through effective leadership.

Participants and Sampling

This study utilized purposive sampling within a single-case study for the opportunity to elaborate on the specific context (Chasokela, 2024), a pseudonymous private secondary school in Kathmandu, Leadership Academy drew potential to yield rich data. Eligible students, teachers, and parents who were currently enrolled/ employed and willing to participate were sent invitations through neutral channel by school administration. Individuals who declined the invitations were excluded without follow-up- especially for minors. No incentives were offered and response rates were documented. Though the transferability remains limited, these steps helped reduce power dynamics and selection bias. The sample size was guided by different grades, roles, data saturation and stakeholder diversity. Participants were drawn from the population of 185 students (grade 4-9) at the school, as well as parents of the students and the staff. Ultimately, there were 40 students, 22 parents, and the 20 staff who participated.

According to established best practices, participants were sorted into homogenous focus groups (Hobolt et al., 2024), that consisted of four students focus groups (n=40), and two focus groups for parents (n=22), and staff (n=20). All data were then anonymized immediately. There was a criterion for inclusion of current enrollment or employment, the only exclusion being for language barriers to quality data. This way, it was possible to build trust and include all perspectives of this diverse group of stakeholders in an ethical and effective manner.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through semi-structured focus groups, selected for their ability to stimulate interactive dialogue and demonstrate co-constructed understandings of leadership (Yousaf et al., 2024). This method was ideal to reveal both commonality and difference across stakeholder groups, since participants build off one another's responses in ways that individual interviews cannot (Alho et al., 2024). The protocols for focus groups conducted for staff members, parents, and students involved open-ended questions on the core questions related to the themes of sustainable leadership practice, communication and engagement, vision, culture, and environment, support and resources, and challenges and recommendation concerning well-being and students' holistic development. The focus group protocols were verified by an expert review to establish the questions' relevance, clarity, and alignment with the existing theoretical frameworks (Ng et al., 2024).

Focus groups were conducted in a private school context over 60-90 minutes. Group sessions were recorded with the written consent of participants, and field notes were prepared to document non-verbal cues and in-the-moment dynamics of the group. Regularly, the researcher noted personal assumptions, set them aside during analysis, and discussed decisions with peers, to reduce bias. No prior relationship was there between the researcher and the school or participants. The researcher moderated all sessions by using the same introductory opening statement, as well as provided neutral probing to minimize bias and encourage equal engagement, which increased the trustworthiness of the data collection process (OER Collective, n.d.). The systematic understanding of all group protocols allowed us to generate rich comparative qualitative data while adhering to methodological rigor.

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis was used to analyze data, given its flexibility to identify and interpret patterns across qualitative datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2024). The data was coded by the lead researcher and reviewed by second researcher for consistency. Discussion was made to make codes refined and collaboratively disagreements were resolved. Grouping related codes formed different themes and checked against the full dataset. For organizing themes Nvivo 12 was used. This analytical framework also supported the study's interpretivist epistemology by initially prioritizing participants' subjective experiences and systematically creating analytical rigor. Key themes were supported with verbatim participant voices to strengthen credibility. A pseudonym and participant type (e.g., Student, Teacher, Parent) is included in each viewpoint and is directly placed under the theme it illustrates. Codes, categories, and themes were iteratively refined until no new codes emerged which indicates data saturation. Initial codes, focused categories, higher-order themes are the theme development structured progression, supported by continuous memo-writing and audit trails in Nvivo 12.

All focus group recordings were transcribed verbatim and imported into NVivo 12 by lead researcher to facilitate systematic coding and analysis (Malone et al., 2024). The analysis process began with immersion in the data followed by the development of initial codes applied to meaningful segments of text using both semantic and latent coding. After systematic review and comparison of codes across focus groups, potential themes were developed from the codes. As part of the analysis process, Nvivo 12 was used for queries and visualizations to compare themes and patterns across different stakeholder groups. The lead researcher and a second reviewer involved in analytical triangulation that independently examined the codes and reviewed theme development. Until agreement was made, differences in interpretation were discussed, strengthening the credibility of the findings (Minor & Duchac, 2023), and an audit trail of all analytical and methodological decisions was maintained to ensure transparency. Due to logistical constraints, member checking was not conducted. However, peer debriefing, careful coding review, and triangulation between reviewers supported credibility. Throughout the process, representative voices were used to ground the research in participant data, and participants' voices were maintained when possible during the thematic refinement process.

Ethical Considerations

Doctoral Research Committee (DRC), Parul University gave approval for this study on 15 November, 2024 with the approval no. 02. Informed consent was obtained from all participants (Jackson et al., 2024). Parental consent for minors (age-appropriate minor assent) was also obtained. To protect confidentiality, all data were pseudonymised immediately in group settings and reminding participants not to share others' comments, and the school is referred to as, "Leadership Academy." Data were securely stored in password protected, encrypted files with limited access, and adheres to data protection standards (Ward et al., 2024). The focus group protocols were a risk mitigated by a set of ground rules to promote respectful discourse and circumvent sensitive matters, to protect the participant's welfare. Confidentiality was ensured in group settings by using pseudonyms and reminding participants not to share others' comments.

3. Results
Participants Demographics
Demographic Frequencies of Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff

95% of staff are ≤39 years (10% ≤19, 45% = 20-29, 40% = 30-39) and (5% ≥40) - mostly a young workforce found. 65% are Female, 35% are Male - female dominant workplace is there. 60% are Married, 40% are Unmarried - significant respondents with family responsibilities are found. 50% have Rs. 50,000-69,000, 25% have <50,000, 25% have >Rs. 70,000 - many respondents belong to middle income average. 65% are ≤12th grade, 25% are Graduates, 10% are Other- not much staff are found with advanced degrees. Passion: 95% staff are highly motivated and 5% are less motivated. 45% have 2-5 years, 30% have ≤1 year, 25% have 6-10 years - more moderate experience and early career

staff are in majority. 50% are Teaching, 35% are Non-teaching, and 15% staff are with combined responsibilities.

Demographic Frequencies of Students

7.5% of the total are 9 years old, 15% are 10 years old, 22.5% are 11 years old, 22.5% are 12 years old, 12.5% are 13 years old, 15% are 14 years old, 5% are 15 years old. In total, there are 45% of students ages 11-12 indicating that and the majority of students are in the middle-childhood stage. A very small number (5%) are 15 years old and there is not a lot of upper age representation in the sample. 57.5% are Female and 42.5% are Male and the student group is slightly female dominated. 10 **%** at class 4 and 30% at class 5, 25% at class 6, 12.5% at class 7 and 15% at class 8 and 7.5% at the 9th class. Class 5 (30) and class 6 (25) have the highest concentration with the majority of the respondents representing middle classes. 35% are Nuclear family, 52.5% Joint family and 12.5% Single-parent family. This indicates that most students are of joint family backgrounds and this could have a positive impact on social and emotional support systems.

Demographic Frequencies of Parents & Guardians

95% of parents & guardians are ≤ 44 years (9.1% ≤ 24, 45.5% = 25 - 34, 40.9% = 35 - 44) and (4.5% ≥ 45) - a predominantly middle aged group of parents & guardians are shown. 77.3% (Female) and 22.7% (Male) - a definite tendency toward female respondents. 40.9% of respondents' monthly earnings were Rs. 50,000 - 69,000, 31.8% were Rs. 30,000 - 49,000, 9.1% were ≤ Rs. 29,000, & 18.2% were ≥ Rs. 70,000 - the majority would be classified as middle-income families. 59.1% of parents' & guardians' highest educational attainment was 12th & Below, 22.7% were Graduate, 4.5% were Postgraduate, & 13.6% were Other - suggesting limited higher educational attainment. 59.1% of parents & guardians reported being in Jobs, 18.2% were in Business & 22.7% had No Occupation - suggesting jobs are the most significant livelihood.

Main Findings

Theme 1: Sustainable Leadership Practices

Students' Perspective: School leadership should support school mentors that develop student confidence, support well-being through health services and visibility, and deliver a balanced learning environment with quality co-curricular and extracurricular activities. To promote motivation, develop recognition and motivational programs, and ensure learning is relevant through problem-based learning projects and specific time to explore passions. "It makes me feel safe and confident to try harder when teachers talk to us calmly and listen to our problems."-Student 33

Parents and Guardians' Perspective: School leadership should foster a safe, positive environment with professionalism from teachers and demonstrate a commitment to qualified staff through hiring and investing in staff training. Leadership should support the whole child development by balancing academic work and sports, tours, and confidence building activities while recognizing and lending support to identifying students' gifts/talents as well as building academic support targeted at learning gaps and strengths. Furthermore, school leadership should keep families updated about well-being and school climate data, establish processes for families to express and report concerns, and provide opportunities for families to join and share their students' learning each quarter. "To grow, children need balance between both academics and activities so, a good school leader values."-Guardian 18

Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff's Perspective: Timely and responsive school leadership teams support staff welfare, which comprises a reasonable salary, a supportive context, and a clear structure, while developing a clear purpose to provide an integrated vision for holistic education from classrooms through the school organization. They should ensure capacity building for staff with professional development and adequate resources. They should create a culture of collaboration and open communication structures, including teams, and secure dedicated time for collaboration in a school day. They should empower staff in ways that promote distributed leadership, recognize staff contributions to children holistically, and capitalize on staff ability to enrich students' experience.

"School leadership must arrange training so we feel motivated to give our best and we must be trusted as professionals."-Staff 19

Theme 2: Communication and Engagement

Students' Perspective: School leadership needs to develop formal opportunities for the student voice to be heard, such as having a student council, suggestion boxes, and including students in rulemaking, in such a way that students know their input will have a meaningful effect. School leadership should establish student representatives on key committees that have voting authority, and engage in regular, transparent discussions to listen to each student's ideas, solution ideas, and areas of concern, and provide all students with documentation of what actions were taken and why, and follow up, if the resolution impacts the entire population. Mechanisms for student voice could be enhanced by developing an ombudsperson program to provide an avenue for some students to express their opinions and ideas outside of the established methods. "Student council is needed which actually matters a lot. With our ideas we want to see something good is happening."-Student 11

Parents and Guardians' Perspective: School leadership should develop a regular schedule of communication to include, at a minimum, four meetings each year and regular updates about student strengths, progress, and challenges, through immediate use of a digital platform and text messaging. Conversations should be multi-stakeholder, community-building dialogue. There should be a consistent, proactive approach to update parents about student behavior and performance. School leadership could establish a monthly newsletter that features student work and parenting tips. Designated staff members should provide personal outreach for parent support that ensures parents feel that they are communicating and partnering with staff in the developmental years of their child. "There should me regular communication not only when there is a problem."-Guardian 1

Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff's Perspective: School leadership should create a regularized communication schedule with weekly meetings and quarterly reviews, regardless of what they do or other ways they can do it, like online meetings and shared electronic dashboards for tracking student progress. They should encourage two-way communication, both individually and through their own group leader staff: while also creating systems for all staff to flag concerns and be able to give feedback and share ideas for improving initiatives. All communications should be with a positive, mentoring tone to build a culture of support. "School leadership should always go through two-way communication i.e. there must be the mechanism of hearing feedback and giving instructions."-Staff 13

Theme 3: Vision, Culture, and Environment

Students' Perspective: School administrators should help design a safe and positive learning environment where rules are visible and enforced, support and counseling are offered, and everyone is comfortable with sanitary materials and facilities. Engagement in well-rounded learning consists of friendly teaching, using technology, a balanced schedule with play, and flexible spaces. School spirit should consist of regular activities, celebrations, a student led culture club, and a house system for community and healthy competition. "I feel very comfortable when teachers act friendly and school environment is clean and safe."-Student 28

Parents and Guardians' Perspective: School leadership should maintain a clean, safe, and inclusive space for students free from bias, where students are supported and encouraged to participate and their confidence is built up with positive praise. A well-rounded education includes rigorous, practical learning opportunities and innovation, as well as co-curricular/extra-curricular opportunities which vary, with a focus on retaining staff long-term to provide continuity in the learning environment. Schools should host regular community events to celebrate diversity and provide space for parents to gather (on-site and online). In essence, school should lead changes in policy about prevention and intervention for bullying, both face-to-face and online, with parents enforcing policy and accountability. "We feel happy and proud when school values diversity and encourages every child to participate."-Guardian 20

Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff's Perspective: The school leadership should create an atmosphere of trust and cooperation through its support of diversity and involvement in the community. They should also empower their staff and students by allowing for shared decision

making. The school should foster ethics and social responsibility through what is taught in curriculum and service. The school should also provide a range of activities, including scheduled opportunities for working outside in nature. Quiet work areas and space for wellness work is also encouraged. The school should recognize personal and professional accomplishments by celebrating milestones, creating a workplace culture where staff can flourish. "When school leadership appreciates small achievements that motivate staff tremendously."- Staff 16

Theme 4: Support & Resources

Students' Perspective: The school leadership has the responsibility to decrease academic stress via a balanced schedule, limited homework, and scheduled daily recreation, to provide quality teaching and resources (e.g., labs, furniture, and transport). They must facilitate a supportive environment using: quiet zones, digital platforms for monitoring academic progress, study skills workshops, and a school-wide culture of mindfulness to manage stress and maintain attention. "High homework makes stressful environment so balanced schedule is needed to learn better."- Student 3

Parents and Guardians' Perspective: The school leadership must provide additional academic assistance, such as extra classes and materials, while fostering a positive and equitable environment that protects students from negativity while they are learning. They should also provide workshops for parents/guardians to help with homework, and internet safety whilst also providing a clear curriculum outline for each grade. Educational leaders can establish a parent resource library with materials according to child development and/or subject area. Guardians' workshops would help us guide our children properly at home."- Guardian 17

Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff's Perspective: The school leadership will facilitate current teaching, organizational resources and infrastructure while actively seeking to relieve workload pressure via wellness initiatives and supportive culture characterized by novelty and recognition. Educational leaders will continue to provide a positive environment with clear, purposeful conflict resolution processes, emotional support, and opportunities for students to engage with their non-academic strengths, talents or interests. Other supports that are important include: access to counseling services for staff, peer support and mentoring for new staff, and access to ongoing self-directed personal and professional development support. "Workload becomes heavy sometimes. There should be wellness programs to manage stress."-Staff 8

Theme 5: Challenges & Recommendations:

Students' Perspective: School leadership must make student safety their top priority by prohibiting the use of corporal punishment, replacing an outdated zero tolerance stance with restorative practices, and ensuring opportunities for upfront professional development related to implementing trauma-informed care. School administrators must not show bias, nor will they show favoritism. Teachers should be engaged to address student weaknesses positively and privately. School leaders must prioritize student voice, celebrate effort over standing, and minimize unhealthy competition to reduce academic anxiety. "Corporal punishment should never happen. We learn better when teachers talk to us, not scare us."-Student 37

Parents and Guardians' Perspective: School leadership should actively seek to understand and respond to the needs of guardians and students while maintaining a positive tone and environment that is free from shouting, favoritism, and unwanted parenting behaviors and maintaining a polite tone and environment that is free from yelling, favoritism, and parent undesired behaviors. School leadership prioritizes a nurturing culture that motivates students to be valued, teachers using current technology should be praised. Guardians must be updated and informed about everything that is important and related to their student. School leaders should avoid using ambiguous vocabulary and jargon; they should be clear and personalized when communicating progress rather than sending a generic message; and eliminate too much time responding to personnel, committing to a 24-hour turnaround. "We want disciplined kindness instead shouting or harsh behavior."- Guardian 6

Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff's Perspective: School leadership should provide ongoing encouragement, support, and scheduled training while promising fair, principled leadership that sustains ethical, and fair decision-making. School leadership should try to minimize unnecessary tasks and forms so that staffs have adequate time to support students. Special education teachers should

have immediate access to specialists to respond to students for severe needs. School leadership should create a clear pathway and system for staff to address overwhelm in a confidential manner. "School leadership needs to listens us before making any decision which reduces unnecessary stress among us."-Staff 21

4. Discussion

Interpretation of Result

The findings indicate cohesive, multi-stakeholder viewpoints that influence aspects of a school ecosystem among stakeholders, which supports holistic student development. In addressing all three research questions, stakeholders viewed core components in agreement but articulate various areas of emphasis in connecting to strategic path for leadership.

Objective 1: "To investigate the ways stakeholders view the value of sustainable leadership practices, modes of communication, and engagement strategies that support students' holistic development."

All groups of stakeholders emphasized relational and transparent leadership. Students and parents expressed that leaders strive to establish safety and trust through confident and more traditionally trained teacher-mentors. Staff and teaching assistants emphasized that their own wellness and well-being (e.g. fair compensation, supportive structures, and respect). Across all stakeholder groups, the need for two-way communication was essential to engagement: Students wanted more formal structures with visible impact within in the school environment (e.g., in-school voting representatives and recorded follow-up or action), parents wanted more continual structured meetings and digital communication of curriculum and activities, and school staff wanted to have a clear structure for sharing information within clear protocols (e.g. shared dashboard, staff construction time).

Objective 2: "To explore the resources, supports and culture of the school that stakeholders believe create the most potent enabling conditions for staff, parents and students to thrive."

All influencers requested that we find a balance between academic achievements with a more holistic practice of well-being. The students wanted to have a lighter schedule, less homework, and actual practice of mindfulness. Parents wanted practical learning that incorporated multiple exposure co-curricular activities. Staff committed to a culture around whole person development alongside academics. The burgeoning agreement from staff reflected the keystone of support: professional development; adequate resources; manageable workload; and emotional wellness support (e.g., counseling, wellness program support) were deemed essential system enablers of sustainability.

Objective 3: "To reflect on the challenges stakeholders experience when trying to support students and note their suggestions for school leadership to help address these challenges."

Two systemic issues emerged across multiple stakeholders. The first was around students and parents experiencing negative relationships - corporal punishment, bias, favoritism - and expressed the desire to foster relational culture based on restorative, trauma-informed practices. The second area of challenge related to ineffective systems that hinder student and parent collaboration - families described slow responses and generic communication; staff described administratively heavy work systems and inadequate ability to keep communication confidential. Stakeholders collectively encouraged leadership to develop integrated, equitable systems that reinforce good relationships, policies and daily practice to create conditions that support a culture that encompasses care and accountability.

Comparison with Existing Literature

This research contributes and augments the existing literature regarding educational leadership and student development holistically. In line with the theory of transformational leadership (Mburu et al., 2023), findings show an inspiring vision, authentic motivation, and sense of inclusion are fundamental to socio-emotional well-being, and holistic student development.

Similar to findings from (Gading, 2024; Mustari and Nurhayati, 2024), instructional leadership remains central to supporting the quality of the curriculum; however, participants insisted that academic rigor is not enough without academic vitality, which supports the students' emotional and ethical well-being. Stakeholders' efforts to find balance and supports reinforce arguments for the lightly phrased holistic education paradigm where there is appreciation for moral, creative, and social development, equally, alongside academic growth (Assefa, 2024; Karakose et al., 2023).

Additionally, the research challenges the previous research that limits effective leadership to a singular association with academic performance (ÖzdGmR et al., 2023). Different from prior research that prioritized the voice of the principal or teacher (Shaked, 2021; Mifsud, 2024), it involves the students and the parents which reframes "effective leadership" into socially co-constructed processes rather than social hierarchy. Findings reinforce Murphy and Brennan's (2022) conclusion of advocating for compromises with distributed leadership for freedom and shared leadership. The students' appeals for their own level of student input, and the parents' push for transparency to have fully informed involvement, demonstrate how distributed leadership can exist in practice.

Stepping away from the Western-derived findings (Arar & Orucu, 2022), this research conducted in Nepal indicates that cultural ways of being including commitment to collective responsibility, family involvement, and caring and upliftment emotionally influence leadership practices. It is focused on building responsive, restorative practices in education and will attend to well-being, which connects to trauma-informed and responsive schooling (Piala et al., 2024), and paying attention to contextualization in a local sense. Alike to Gramaxo et al. (2023) and Ramos et al. (2023), it also affirms that relationships of trust, safety and empathy are the foundations of effective schools. Thus, this study acknowledges leadership as a fundamental role in promoting holistic development, all while adding to the scholarship of developing a framework that is co-voiced and responsive to context. This study is a bridging opportunity between scholarship and lived experience (Juvonen & Toom, 2023) and is an invitation to educators and educational leaders, along with policymakers and education systems, to build and co-construct inclusive leadership environments (ecosystem) that support a focus on the value of human well-being, in addition to academic success.

Implications for Practice

The outcomes of this inquiry have important implications for educators and policy actors seeking to advance the whole child through effective school leadership. The results suggest an important point for educators and practitioners as it points to an integrative leadership framework in practice and co-aligning academics with the social-emotional, ethical and creative dimensions of learning. Educational leaders need to value professional learning experiences that encompass trauma-informed, student-centered and restorative practices that can replace punitive practices with care and support. Educational leaders must also institutionalize clear communication structures between multiple sites of education, including dashboards, student councils, and routine meetings, for parental engagement level, that favor communication and trust between all stakeholders.

The authors recommend that initiative leaders extend the focus of the leadership standards to well-being indicators and cite indicators of emotional safety, inclusion, and engagement of stakeholders. They further recommend that initiative leaders could develop policies that promote distributed leadership, through involvement of teachers, parents, and students in school decision making. Policies should also encourage the holistic approaches to teaching and learning by investing in teacher wellness, being prepared for sufficient resources, and allowing teachers to be part of research-oriented approaches to support their own motivational needs and needs of their communities. Policies ought to support education systems that focus on restorative and equitable practices related to school accreditation and quality assurance, and would therefore consider the whole student, the context in which they are learning, and the capacity for learner innovation and application of new knowledge. Together, these changes could bring educational leadership theory, or 'the theory of leadership', to the

forefront of practice, by supporting schools to value excellence in education alongside the whole development of every human.

Theoretical Implications

This article makes a significant contribution to the scholarship of educational leadership by proposing a robust, context-responsive framework for moral development in students. The framework builds on instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership models, providing the evidence that traditional models will probably only be effective when the meaning is socially constructed by multiple stakeholders. The study challenges how we typically think about leadership and shows that leadership may best be conceived as a co-construction of efficacy through trusting relational processes, predicated on all stakeholders (students, parents, and staff) having a participatory culture around a common vision of action. Viewing through a multi-stakeholder lens also places leadership, and specifically its effectiveness, at the intersection of a social justice framework not simply as one of 'managerial behaviors' but within a dynamic ecosystem of relationally ethical behaviors within cultural contexts.

Moreover, this study contributes to transformational leadership theory by situating transformative leadership and motivation within the broader constructs of emotional safety, well-being, and inclusivity, rather than within performance outcomes. This study extends distributed leadership theory by exploring the idea of equitable structures of power-sharing that valorize student and parental voice within the school governance structure. This study offers the idea of "contextualized holistic leadership," which extends emotional, academic, and social constructs of leadership within a co-constructed web of educational leadership enacted through a cultural frame. As a result, the study contributes to the progression of thinking among Western-centric constructs of leadership and locally informed practice with a theoretically rich model developed in this study. Leadership is situated as an ethically-informed, socially situated, and collectively accomplished process.

Limitations

Though this study contributed meaningfully to the existing body of work and we discussed the validity of the findings, it does not come without limitations. First, we only collected data from a single private secondary school in Kathmandu, so findings may not necessarily transfer to public schools, rural schools, or schooling contexts defined by different resource and culture. Second, we recognize that due to purposive sampling techniques typically used in qualitative research, we may not have been able to avoid selection bias in the focus group discussion, which was likely comprised of a few motivated or vocal members of the discussion. Finally, focus group dynamics could contribute to popularity bias or to group members providing responses based on social desirability. Due to time and logistical constraints, member checking was not conducted. So, the proposed model and findings should be viewed as provisional. An external audit and peer debriefing were used to cross-check analytic decisions to strengthen credibility in the absence of participant verification. Limited transferability is there as a result, and future studies should go through participation validation.

As an interpretivist qualitative inquiry, this study is also context specific and not easily generalizable. Also, without longitudinal data, we may not fully understand how leadership practices are enacted in schools across the school year and beyond. Future inquiries could study similar or different schools; undertake mixed or longitudinal studies; or use multiple methods of data collection including observing classroom practice. Triangulation of data supports validity, addresses bias, and provides a more thorough evaluation across time about growing effective leadership in support of the holistic development of children. The proposed framework and recommendations should be viewed as provisional and are context-specific to this single private school. To refine and validate these insights before broader application further studies across diverse school settings are needed.

Future Research Directions

Based on the study's findings and context, future research is warranted, including a variety of different school settings (e.g., public education, rural schools and community-based organizations) to investigate how cultural and resource differences may inform the practices of holistic leaders. Comparative studies may also be effective and allow for the study of leadership models in different regions or systems of education to see how socio-economic and policy differences shape the leadership practices used. Additional longitudinal study may also investigate how structural models inform an ongoing leadership practice to change academic, emotional, and ethical development of students over time.

Future studies may also be interested to include a mixed methods research design, such as including a survey and/or observational data along with qualitative research, to support a more generalizable finding and a deeper inquiry. Other innovative possibilities for authentic voice of the students and parents are digital ethnography or participatory action research. Future research may aim to study lesser-studied dimensions of holistic leadership (i.e., gender, digital leadership and teacher well-being in contributing to a holistic student experience). Drawing upon these studies will provide opportunities to further develop the emerging framework of a contextualized holistic leadership model, and strengthen both theoretical and practical relevance to educational contexts.

5. Conclusion
Summary

This research investigated the perceptions of teachers, parents, and students of effective school leaders for educating the whole child, indicating that aspects of leadership centered around trust, collaboration, and emotional well-being hold just as much weight as academic success. The research reveals that the most inclusive, transparent, and facilitating leadership practices produce the conditions necessary for all education variables to be flourishing. The research further extends a comprehensive notion of "contextualized holistic leadership" by merging the practices from instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership modalities within a practice-centered context. In general, the findings validate that intentional, educational leadership is a process created collectively and relationally grounded in ethical practices and action that facilitates human growth and academic success. The proposed framework and recommendations should be viewed as provisional and are context-specific to this single private school. To refine and validate these insights before broader application further studies across diverse school settings are needed.

Significance

This study plays an important role in addressing a significant gap in knowledge around school leadership that is directly involved with multi-stakeholder perspective in Nepal. The inclusion of students, parents and teachers, extends the definition of leadership as a collective process that is contextual, rather than solely hierarchical. The study also redefines effectiveness and scholarships beyond solely academics, including emotional, ethical, and social well-being as central to develop holistically. The study develops traditional leadership theory to new levels and then offers the implications and strategies for practical application with a meaningful context to develop school-wide culturally relevant, inclusive and supportive environments.

This study identifies, redefines and develops the theory of "contextualized holistic leadership" as a school leadership approach that connects the traditional instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership models to work within the local socio-education context. The study provides detailed practical strategies for educators and policymakers in designing leadership preparation programs and courses with an emphasis on trust, communication and well-being of children at the school level. At a social level, this research strengthens such responsibility of schools to nurture each child's potential. Overall, this study has the potential to connect leadership theory and practice, and first addressing a limited research study, and both stimulating thinking and initiation for further

inquiry into leadership models based on the intersection of academic excellence with human development.

Conflict of Interest Statement

Doctor Researcher Pvt. Ltd. had no role in funding, recruitment, data collection, analysis, or interpretation. All research decisions were made independently by the authors. The authors claim that they hold no possible conflicts of interest in relation to this research. All analyses, correspondence, and conclusions in this study were conducted under a framework of academic integrity and the intention of scholarly work in the field of educational leadership.

References

[1] Alho, J., Hanhimäki, E., & Eskelä-Haapanen, S. (2024). Finnish student teachers' perceptions of their leadership development in a study group intervention to enhance their teacher leadership. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, *19*(4), 414-432.

[2] Alzoraiki, M., Ahmad, A. R., Ateeq, A., & Milhem, M. (2024). The role of transformational leadership in enhancing school culture and teaching performance in Yemeni public schools. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, 1413607.

[3] Arar, K., & Orucu, D. (2022). The research on educational leadership for refugees since 2009: an international systemic review of empirical evidence. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2022.2068190

[4] Assefa, E. A. (2024). From classrooms to global impact: Leveraging quality education to shape a sustainable, interconnected world. *The Journal of Quality in Education, 14*(24), 1–24.

[5] Aydogdu, A. L. F. (2023). Exploring Different Aspects of Nursing Leadership: An Integrative Review of Qualitative Studies. *Modern Care Journal*, In Press(In Press): e130402.

[6] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2024). Supporting best practice in reflexive thematic analysis reporting in Palliative Medicine: A review of published research and introduction to the Reflexive Thematic Analysis Reporting Guidelines (RTARG). *Palliative medicine*, *38*(6), 608-616.

[7] Brohman, I., Blank, G., Mitchell, H., Dubé, E., & Bettinger, J. A. (2024). Opportunities for HPV vaccine education in school-based immunization programs in British Columbia, Canada: A qualitative study. *Human Vaccines & Immunotherapeutics*, *20*(1), 2326779.

[8] Chasokela, D. (2024). The networking sites in student teaching and learning. A case study at Zimbabwean University. *Journal of Computers for Science and Mathematics Learning*, *1*(2), 117-129.

[9] Gading, S. J. L. (2024). Instructional leadership practices of the school heads to improve teachers' performance. *United International Journal for Research & Technology*, *5*(6), 89-119.

[10] Gramaxo, P., Seabra, F., Abelha, M., & Dutschke, G. (2023). What makes a school a happy school? Parents' perspectives. *Education Sciences, 13*(4), 375. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13040375

[11] Hobolt, S. B., Lawall, K., & Tilley, J. (2024). The polarizing effect of partisan echo chambers. *American Political Science Review*, *118*(3), 1464-1479.

[12] Jackson, A. M., Goland, S., Farhan, H. A., Yaseen, I. F., Prameswari, H. S., Böhm, M., ... & Petrie, M. C. (2024). A novel score to predict left ventricular recovery in peripartum cardiomyopathy derived from the ESC EORP Peripartum Cardiomyopathy Registry. *European Heart Journal*, *45*(16), 1430-1439.

[13] Juvonen, S., & Toom, A. (2023). Teachers' expectations and expectations of teachers: Understanding teachers' societal role. In M. Thrupp, P. Seppänen, J. Kauko, & S. Kosunen (Eds.), *Finland's famous education system: Unvarnished insights into Finnish schooling* (pp. 121–135). Springer Nature Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8241-5_8

[14] Karakose, T., Tülübaş, T., Papadakis, S., & Yirci, R. (2023). Evaluating the intellectual structure of the knowledge base on transformational school leadership: A bibliometric and science mapping analysis. *Education Sciences*, *13*(7), 708.

[15] Malone, C., Hooker, S., Todman, E., Mohabir, A., & Jones, D. J. (2024). Exploring the effects of learning from excellence: a qualitative study of staff perspectives. *British Journal of Healthcare Management*, *30*(2), 1-9.

[16] Mburu, L. N., Ragui, M., & Ongeti, W. (2023). Influence of Transformational Leadership on Millennial Workforce Engagement in Compliant International NGOs in Kenya. *International Journal of Organizational Leadership, 13*(2), 275-294.

[17] Mehrad, A., Bouzedif, M., & Rweramila, N. G. (2024). Integrating psychology, cognitive, and behavioral science in the concept of education and student success in the educational system. Tuijin Jishu/Journal of Propulsion Technology, 45(3), 4127–4144.

[18] Mifsud, D. (2024). A systematic review of school distributed leadership: Exploring research purposes, concepts and approaches in the field between 2010 and 2022. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, *56*(2), 154-179.

[19] Minor, J., & Duchac, N. (2023). An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: School Counselor Trainees' Experience in Peer Group Supervision. *Journal of Counseling Research and Practice*, *8*(1), 3.

[20] Murphy, G., & Brennan, T. (2022). Enacting distributed leadership in the Republic of Ireland: Assessing primary school principals' developmental needs using constructive developmental theory. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 50*(3), 666-685.

[21] Mustari, M., & Nurhayati, S. (2024). Multifaceted Instructional Leadership of School Principals to Improve Student Character in The Digital Era. *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education*, 8(2), 488–504.

[22] Ng, D. T. K., Wu, W., Leung, J. K. L., Chiu, T. K. F., & Chu, S. K. W. (2024). Design and validation of the AI literacy questionnaire: The affective, behavioural, cognitive and ethical approach. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, *55*(3), 1082-1104.

[23] OER Collective. (n.d.). Qualitative Research. CAUL. Retrieved December 10, 2024, from https://oercollective.caul.edu.au/qualitative-research/chapter/__unknown__-14/

[24] Özdemir, N., Gümüş, S., Kılınç, A. Ç., & Bellibaş, M. Ş. (2023). A systematic review of research on the relationship between school leadership and student achievement: An updated framework and future direction. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 52*(5), 1020–1046.

[25] Paudel, P. (2024). Examining paradigmatic shifts: Unveiling the philosophical foundations shaping social research methodologies. *Journal of the University of Ruhuna*, *12*(1).

[26] Piala, M., Kilag, O. K., Abella, J., Groenewald, E., Cordova Jr, N., & Tañiza, F. N. (2024). Building capacity, driving impact: A holistic approach to school leader development. *Excellencia: International Multidisciplinary Journal of Education (2994-9521)*, *2*(1), 25-35.

[27] Ramos, R. D. A., Goulart, D. C., & Jacomini, M. A. (2023). Experiences, perceptions and expectations of students in managerial school of Educational network of São Paulo. *Pro-Posições*, *34*, e20210129.

[28] S Groenewald, E., Groenewald, C. A., C Dela Cruz, R. A., T Uy, F., T Kilag, O. K., & T Villaver Jr, M. (2024). Navigating educational leadership: Challenges, styles, and impacts–A systematic review. *IMJRISE International Multidisciplinary Journal of Research for Innovation, Sustainability, and Excellence*, *1*(2), 262-267.

[29] Shaked, H. (2021). Relationship-based instructional leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2021.1944673

[30] Unlu, A., & Kotonen, T. (2024). Online polarization and identity politics: An analysis of Facebook discourse on Muslim and LGBTQ+ communities in Finland. *Scandinavian political studies*, *47*(2), 199-231.

[31] Ward, M., Clarke, N., McLoughlin, S., Golden, D., & Kenny, R. A. (2024). Data management plan for a rapid response sub-study of an existing cohort: The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) COVID-19 sub-study [version 1; peer review: awaiting peer review]. *HRB Open Research*, 7, 38. https://doi.org/10.12688/hrbopenres.13901.1

[32] Yousaf, U., Khan, M. F., Khan, I., Khan, M. Z., & Dogar, M. N. (2024). Spiritually empowered leadership and workplace spirituality at Akhuwat foundation: a qualitative case study. *Qualitative Research in Financial Markets*.