EXPLORING STORIES OF WOMEN HEAD TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS: TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

Anu Khadka

A Dissertation

Submitted to
School of Education

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Philosophy in Education (Educational Leadership)

Kathmandu University
Dhulikhel, Nepal

April 2024

AN ABSTRACT

of the dissertation of *Anu Khadka*, for the degree of *Master of Philosophy in Educational Leadership*, presented on 9 April 2024 entitled *Exploring Stories of Women Head Teachers in Schools: Transformational Leadership Perspective.*

APPROVED BY

.....

Asst. Prof. Shesha Kanta Pangeni, PhD

Dissertation Supervisor

This study uses a transformational leadership lens to investigate the experiences, difficulties, and approaches to the leadership of Nepali women school head teachers in Nepal. By using the liberal feminism lens, the research seeks to reveal how gender dynamics affect leadership opportunities and practices in the education sector through women's narratives on the way to hold head teacher positions. The study is guided by interpretive paradigm utilizing the qualitative research design with narrative inquiry to investigate the unique contributions and challenges encountered by female head teachers in the Lalitpur, Nepal.

Key results highlight the importance of determination, confidence, family support, dedication to work, and leadership capabilities in enabling women to attain leadership positions, even in the face of social bias. Legal safeguards and gender-based quotas have improved the involvement of women in leadership positions. However, obstacles such as managing personal and professional obligations continue to exist. Likewise, female head teachers exhibit leadership skills by promoting individual and career development, overcoming challenging circumstances, and acting as exemplary figures. Nevertheless, women head teachers still face challenges such as gender imbalance and role dilemma.

The study highlights the need to implement organized initiatives to combat gender discrimination and advance women's educational leadership. Women head teachers in Nepal promote positive change in school settings, defying established gender roles. Their unwavering commitment and resolute attitude serve as sources of

motivation for other female leaders, emphasizing the capacity of gender-inclusive leadership approaches to enhance educational achievements and advance gender parity within Nepal's educational system.

..... 9 April 2024

Anu Khadka

Degree Candidate

शोध-सार

काठमाडौँ विश्वविद्यालय शिक्षा संकायको एजुकेशनल लिडरशिपमा दर्शनाचार्य उपाधिका लागी अनु खड्काले *परिवर्तनवादी नेतृत्व परिप्रेक्ष्यको आधारमा विद्यालयका महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरुको कथन अन्वेषण* भन्ने शिर्षकको शोधग्रन्थ विक्रम संवत् २०८० चैत्र २७ गते प्रस्तुत गर्नुभएकोले शोधग्रन्थको निम्नोल्लेखित शोध-सार अनुमोदन गरिएको छ ।

शोध-सार अनुमोदनकर्ता

.....

उप-प्राध्यापक शेषकान्त पंगेनी, विद्यावारिधि

शोधग्रन्थ निर्देशक

यो अध्ययनमा परिवर्तनकारी नेतृत्व दृष्टिकोण प्रयोग गरी महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरुको अनुभव, कठिनाइहरु र नेतृत्व शैलीहरुको खोजी गरिएको छ । उदारवादी नारीवादको दृष्टिकोण प्रयोग गरेर यस अनुसन्धानमा महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरुको कथनहरु विश्लेषण गरिएको छ । साथै, महिला प्रधानाध्यापकको पद प्राप्त गर्ने क्रममा लैङ्गिक गतिशीलताले उनिहरुको नेतृत्व अवसर र अभ्यासहरुलाई शिक्षा क्षेत्रमा कसरी असर गर्छ भन्ने कुरा प्रकट गरिएको छ । यो अध्ययनमा व्याख्यात्मक प्रतिमान (Interpretive Paradigm) प्रयोग गरी ललीतपुरका महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरुले सामना गरेका चुनौतीहरु र शैक्षिक योगदानहरुको खोजी गरिएको छ ।

यस अध्ययनले सामाजिक पूर्वाग्रहको चुनौती हुँदाहुँदै पनि महिलाहरुको नेतृत्व हासिल गर्ने क्षमता बढाउन दृढता, आत्मविश्वास, पारिवारिक सहयोग, कामप्रतिको समर्पण र नेतृत्व क्षमताहरुको महत्वलाई प्रकाश पारेको छ । नेपालमा कानुनी सुरक्षा र लैङ्गिक आरक्षणले नेतृत्वको पदहरुमा महिलाहरुको सहभागितालाई सुधार गरेको देखिन्छ । यद्यपि, व्यक्तिगत र पेशागत दायित्वहरु प्रवन्ध गर्ने तथा भूमिका निर्वाहमा देखिने द्विविधा जस्ता चुनौतीहरु अवस्थित छन् भन्ने कुरा यस अध्ययनको नतिजाले उजागर गरेको छ । महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरुले व्यक्तिगत र पेशागत विकासलाई प्रवर्द्धन गर्दै, चुनौतीपूर्ण परिस्थितिहरुलाई पार गरेर, र उदाहरणीय व्यक्तित्वहरुको रुपमा कार्य गरेर नेतृत्व कौशल प्रदर्शन गरेको देखियो । यति हुँदाहुँदै पनि विद्यालय व्यवस्थापनमा लैङ्गिक असन्तुलन जस्ता चुनौतीहरु विद्यमान रहेको पाइयो ।

यस अध्ययनले लैङ्गिक भेदभाव विरुद्ध लड्न र महिला शैक्षिक नेतृत्वलाई अगाडि बढाउन संगठित पहलहरु गर्ने आवश्यकतालाई जोड दिएको छ । साथै, अध्ययनले नेपालमा महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरुले स्थापित लैङ्गिक भूमिकालाई बेवास्ता गर्दै विद्यालय व्यवस्थापनमा सकारात्मक

परिवर्तनलाई महत्व दिनुपर्ने सुझाव दिएको छ । उनिहरुको अटल प्रतिबद्धता र दृढ मनोवृत्तिले प्रधानाध्यापक बन्न चाहने अन्य महिलाहरुको लागि समेत प्रेरणाको श्रोतको रुपमा काम गरेको देखिन्छ, जसले शैक्षिक उपलब्धिहरु बढाउन र नेपालको शैक्षिक प्रणाली भित्र लैङ्गिक समानतालाई प्रवर्द्धन गर्न लैङ्गिक समावेशी नेतृत्व दृष्टिकोणको क्षमतालाई जोड दिएको छ ।

..... वकम संवत् २०८० चैत्र २७

अनु खड्का

उपाधि उम्मेदवार

This dissertation entitled *Exploring Stories of Women Head Teachers in Schools: Transformational Leadership Perspective* is presented by Anu Khadka on 9 April 2024.

APPROVED BY

..... 9 April 2024
Asst. Prof. Shesha Kanta Pangeni, PhD
Dissertation Supervisor/ Head of Department

..... 9 April 2024
Amina Singh, PhD
External Examiner

..... 9 April 2024
Prof. Bal Chandra Luitel, PhD
Dean/ Chair of Research Committee

I understand and agree that my dissertation will become part of a permanent collection in the library of Kathmandu University. My signature below authorizes the release of my dissertation to any reader upon request for scholarly purposes.

..... 9 April 2024
Anu Khadka
Degree Candidate

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work, and it has not been submitted for any other degree at any other university.

..... 9 April 2024

Anu Khadka

Degree Candidate

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the women head teachers who inspire young girls and women to strive for complete empowerment by acting as role models. Similarly, it is dedicated to all the helpful hands that made sure women were treated equally. It also pays tribute to the national policy and numerous organizations that have been playing a pivotal role in enabling women to attain equal rights.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely thank everyone for their help while writing my dissertation. First and foremost, I thank Asst. Prof. Shesha Kanta Pangeni, PhD, Head of the Department of Educational Leadership, for supervising my dissertation. His insightful guidance, constant support, and direction have been helpful to me during my research. I am grateful for the significant time and effort he dedicated to my work by offering constructive feedback, which has been instrumental in developing this research study into a critical piece of knowledge. His guidance and motivation helped me stay motivated and concentrate on my research.

In the same regard, I would like to express my gratitude to our respected Dean, Prof. Bal Chandra Luitel, PhD, and Assoc. Prof. Dhanapati Subedi, PhD, for their unwavering leadership and support during this dissertation. Likewise, I am thankful to Prof. Mana Prasad Wagley, PhD, Assoc. Prof. Prakash Chandra Bhattarai, Ph.D., Asst. Prof. Rewat Dhakal, PhD, and all the mentors and faculties of KUSOED for their facilitation, advice, motivation, and constructive feedback.

Further, I thank my friends Shreeram Gyawali, Binita Sundar Chaudhary, and Rashmila Bajracharya for their support, motivation, and guidance. Their shared enthusiasm, wisdom, and support created an inspiring atmosphere that reinforced my dissertation. Similarly, I cannot forget to appreciate the incredible support of Mr. Ganesh Khatiwada, the librarians, and all the administrative staff of KUSOED. Similarly, I would like to thank all of my research participants sincerely. Without their kind efforts, this study would not have been possible. I appreciate their willingness to share their experiences, viewpoints, and thoughts with me and the effort they took to participate. Their experiences have motivated me and given me a better knowledge of women's status in educational leadership positions in Nepal.

Last but not least, I want to express my deep gratitude to my father, Mr. Kamal Bahadur Chhetri, my sister, Urbashi Khadka, and my entire family for their love and support throughout every phase of my academic journey. Without their encouragement, inspiration, and guidance, I could not have progressed to this point.

Anu Khadka

Degree Candidate

TABLE OF CONTENT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS i
TABLE OF CONTENT ii
CHAPTER I 1
INTRODUCTION 1
Scene Setting 1
My Positionality 5
Statement of the Problem 8
Purpose of the Study 11
Research Questions 11
The Rationale of the Study 12
Delimitation of the Study 13
Essence of Chapter 13
CHAPTER II 14
LITERATURE REVIEW 14
Women's Leadership in Education 14
Underrepresentation of Women in Leadership Positions 15
Individual, Social, and Professional Context of Women Head Teachers 17
Policy Review 20
Theoretical Review 22
Transformational Leadership Theory 23
Feminist Theory 25
Liberal Feminism 25
Empirical Review 27
Identification of Research Gap 29
Theoretical Guideline 31
Transformational Leadership Theory 31
Liberal Feminism Theory 31
Essence of Chapter 32
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 33
Philosophical Consideration 33
Research Paradigm and Design 34

Research Sites and Participants 35
My Research Participants 37
Information Collection Process, Tools, and Techniques 38
Interpretation and Meaning Making 39
Quality Standard of the Study 41
Temporality 41
Sociality 42
Spatiality 42
Ethical Consideration 42
Essence of Chapter 44
EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN HEADTEACHERS REFLECTING INDIVIDUAL, SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONTEXTS 45
Self-Confidence and Determination 45
Maternal Essence: A Canvas of Potentiality or Stumbling Block 50
Socio-Cultural Support for Women's Leadership 52
Familial Bond: Help or Hindrance on the Path to School Head Teacher 56
Underrepresentation; Barriers to Women's Participation in Leadership 60
Educational Opportunities and Policy 61
Social Values: To Accept Women in Leadership and Gender Disparity 62
Role Dilemma of Women 66
Discussion and Reflection 70
Essence of Chapter 74
CHAPTER- V 75
STORIES REFLECTING ON TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE 75
Ansika as a Role Model 75
Rachayeeta as a Creator: Motivate Followers for Critical Thinking 80
Shrawantika as an Inspirational Motivator 85
Binika as a Believer of "Jasto Ropyo Ustai Falchha" 90
Discussion and Reflection 92
Essence of Chapter 96
CHAPTER VI 97
INSIGHTS, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS 97
Insights from the Study 97

Conclusions 99
Implications 101
Implications for Women School Head Teachers 101
Implications for Future Women School Head Teachers 101
Implications for Educational Policy Makers 101
Implication for Leadership Development 102
Implication for Future Researchers 102
REFERENCES 103
ANNEXES 119

ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EFA	Education for All
HR	Human Resource
KUSOED	Kathmandu University School of Education
LMC	Lalitpur Metropolitan City
MoE	Ministry of Education
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SESP	School Education Sector Plan
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
SSDP	School Sector Development Plan
TSC	Teacher Service Commission
UN	United Nation
UNICEF	United Children's Emergency Fund
UGC	University Grants Commission

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The chapter begins with my experiences and observations of the challenges faced by women head teachers from transformational perspectives. I have presented the context of my research about how I got inspired. I have explored the situation of the women's struggling experiences to reach the position of head teacher and their fights to transform themselves as women head teachers in the school context. Similarly, I recalled my experiences and observations that a woman faced balancing personal and professional life due to gender. To provide more understanding in my research, I have presented my personal positionality by describing how these factors might impact my perspective and research. After that, I have described the problem statement and research purpose in detail. To investigate the narratives of female head teachers and their experiences to meet the purpose of this study, I have presented the research questions. Lastly, this chapter deals with the rationales and delimitations of this study.

Scene Setting

I am honored to have grown up with an educated single father, the youngest of three children. When it came to raising or teaching us, he never distinguished between his son and daughters (us). All three of us got equal education opportunities. My elder sister attempted the TSC exam after the completion of grade 12 and got married. After getting married, she could not pursue higher education. After some years of marriage, TSC published the result, and she was selected from the open quota. My sister and our entire family were delighted. During that time, she was the mother of two children. She started working with enthusiasm, and my father also encouraged her as he was serving as a head teacher at a government school. Her posting was more than one hour of riding distance from her home. Therefore, she struggled a lot to work. She had to complete her dual responsibilities. She wanted to keep working, but no one was there to support her, and her husband also pressured her to quit her job. She was under intense pressure to quit her job. In the end, she quit to save her married life.

The incident in my sister's life negatively affected my young, innocent, and ambitious mind. At the same time, my elder cousin's sister always inspired me with her passion for higher studies and her thoughts about being independent. When she started her teaching profession, she was unmarried. However, once she married, her in-laws wanted her to stay home and care for the family. Although he could not stand up to his family, her husband supported her. Then, after my sister had started convincing her in-laws by flawlessly carrying out her duties to her family and job, her family was further impressed by her financial support. Her in-laws expressed optimism about working "Buhari," (the daughter-in-law). She transformed her status within the family in this way. That is how I got inspired. She has taught for over two decades with total dedication and enthusiasm. She deservedly got promoted to head teacher (High School), which was difficult against purposefully speared-out rumors by her under-qualified competitors. The rumor was that women could not lead the organization, could never devote time as required, and so on. Al-Jaradat (2014) mentioned that the negative belief of the social dimension towards women's leadership is a significant challenge against women's leadership. The school management team had faith in her competence because she was not only an academically prepared candidate but also had a strong commitment to her professional responsibilities during her work as a teacher. She never gave up hope, even under challenging circumstances. She focused on her work without listening to gossip that was unfavorable. Her ability to persuade her family proved that she has leadership qualities, too. In this way, she successfully overcame the challenges of rumors and likely undue influence against her by the organization's management committee. Now, she has been handling her professional role more effectively than the previous leaders (male) and has successfully changed society's perception. That is how I got inspired to choose teaching as my profession since the intermediate level of my studies.

It was a proud moment for our relatives and her, too, as she led the community school successfully as head teacher and managed personal roles together. The school is currently ranked among the top 5 in the area, where student enrollment has also significantly expanded. In the same way, she recently received an award from the municipality for her efforts to raise educational standards. There were challenges while leading an organization, and she addressed those challenges successfully and

satisfactorily. I have noticed several times that she is disturbed and stressed, and she even used to share such situations with me since we were very close. She expressed several times that negative comments were made for late coming home after attending meetings by society and sometimes by family members. Her efforts, as professional responsibilities, had been ignored. As a lady employee, it was challenging for her to receive support and cooperation from colleagues and surrounding personnel in daily professional activities as she hardly spends extra time for frequent gatherings or get-togethers with colleagues, as males do. Msila (2013) stated that women do not get social support and always need to prove their leadership ability in the patriarchal society. I remember that she articulated several times that she felt like resigning from the post against such biased behavior but stood and continued facing such challenges and living with them the next day.

I started teaching in 2002 A.D. as a primary-level teacher in a well-established institutional school. The school was extended and used to have departments such as departmental heads, coordinators, administrators, in-charges, principals, and vice-principals for different blocks. There were considerable female teachers up to the lower secondary level; male teachers enjoyed vital leading positions, whereas female teachers had few deputy-level posts. Staff used to feel hesitant or fearful while dealing with the principal in classrooms and staff rooms. We rarely had vital discussion opportunities about management decisions with the principal, but the vice principal and respective coordinators used to discuss with us for follow-ups on other required issues. The vice-principal possessed all the qualities needed to be a good principal. Her working style was inclusive, and she was always ready to listen and manage capabilities while caring for students and teachers. After some time, the principal resigned, and we thought the vice principal could lead the school. Unfortunately, the Management hired a new principal, a male. The vice principal resigned from her post, disappointed in not being provided the opportunity. This way, the school and we lost experienced and quality human resources. I wondered why females are not considered good in vital leading positions. Is it only due to gender bias or something else? Despite possessing all the qualities an organization requires, I resigned after some months from that school to pursue higher degrees. This situation is another example of institutional challenges over gender, which shows people

have already prejudiced about a female leadership style that they are not suitable for a leadership role though (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmid, 2001) and (Jogulu & Wood, 2006) believed the leadership style of women is more supportive, collaborative, democratic, caring and relation-oriented.

After completing my Master's degree, I worked for three more schools and two colleges as a part-time teacher/lecturer. The last school was almost the same as the previous one; male and deputy positions filled key positions only offered to female teachers. The school offered me a full-time teaching position with good perks and facilities, so I accepted and started working accordingly. I took some initiatives, such as a counselor for sexual harassment and a discipline instructor for the management stream, on my own. The Management responded to these self-initiation/motivational activities quite encouragingly. There was a system of salary increments and upgrading the position as the performance appraisal in every new session, and I also was expecting the remuneration increment based on my contribution, experience, and self-initiative drive for the work.

On the contrary, the Management increased the remuneration by being biased compared to a male coordinator who was less qualified than me. The principal told me about my dissatisfaction with the increment and that he was convinced of my qualifications, ability, and performance, but he opined that only men could handle the disciplinary issues better at the higher level as they are strict. To retain him, they accepted his demand. It seems that educational leaders still believe that male candidates should only hold leadership roles and that disciplining students is the best way to keep everyone under control. Such a notion among educational leaders may have developed due to the underrepresentation of women head teachers. Helterbran and Rieg (2004) also found that some parents believe in controlling young male students needing male principals or leaders. Educational leaders may be considering the disciplinary issue from the parent's perspective. It serves no use to demonstrate that the only way to preserve discipline is through strictness to his biased attitude regarding leadership style related to wages and positions. I thought such a biased attitude toward so-called academic people was alarming for equality and equity, as thought by the nation. Soklaridis et al. (2017) also found that it is challenging for women in leadership positions to be treated equally

regarding the selection process, promotions, equal remuneration, and fair performance evaluation in the workplace. This situation led me to resign from my job. The principal rang me up and requested to join again, but I did not, though he regarded my contribution. The situation of facing such challenges is difficult to forget.

Then, I tried the health sector as a health education student and have always been fascinated by doing different work. I was selected as an administrative/HR officer, and after one year of hard work, I was promoted to human resources (HR). Head in one of the renowned hospitals in town. I enjoyed six years of working as H.R. Head. I noticed a high turnover of departmental heads' female employees (staff nurses). As an H.R. head, I found marriage, delivery cases, and time management after delivery to be the main reasons for departmental leaders' strict rules or treating behaviors for female turnover in the health sector while analyzing exit interviews. Physiological aspects have been in context for developing one-sided issues for women in working society; another is the leadership style of either male or female leaders. As an H.R. head, I observed that even some females are not ready to take the leading position due to the lack of confidence to handle such a position, which shows that one of the reasons for having obstacles in the career development of women is a lack of self-confidence for handling the leadership positions (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016). I am currently employed at a private school as a vice principal. As a teacher, I have experienced numerous highs and lows in my profession. Even though I now oversee all administrative tasks as vice principal (we have a part-time head teacher) and all power and authority, I was coerced and tricked by the male co-founders. Before assuming the vice principal position at my school, I had no idea how difficult it is to establish yourself as a leader. I was inspired to conduct this study as I began to understand the state of women's leadership in schools while keeping this information in mind.

My Positionality

Positionality refers to an individual's social and cultural background, which influences perspectives and experiences. While studying the experiences of women head teachers in the Lalitpur district, it is important to recognize my positionality, as it substantially impacts the research method and results. Positionality encompasses

recognizing the researcher's identity, background, and viewpoint and how these elements influence the research's structure, data gathering, analysis, and interpretation.

Being a late thirties woman of the Chhetri caste, hailing from a middle-class family, and possessing a master’s degree in education, my identification encompasses several socio-cultural aspects that influence my comprehension and analysis of the study setting. Benefiting from the presence of an enlightened single father who provided equal educational chances to all his children, regardless of their gender, I was lucky enough to have a well-rounded upbringing. My family instilled a firm conviction in gender equality and the significance of education, which significantly shapes my approach to this study.

My own experiences additionally influence my scientific approach. Observing my older sister's endeavor to harmonize her career ambitions with her home obligations highly influenced me. Notwithstanding her skills and fervor for her job, she encountered tremendous pressure from her spouse and cultural norms to prioritize family above her professional pursuits, resulting in her decision to leave. This episode instilled a profound feeling of inequity about women's structural obstacles while striving to advance in their professions, especially in leadership positions.

On the other hand, my older cousin's sister's path as a committed educator who effectively overcame family and social obstacles to become a principal has been a motivating influence. The way she juggled her professional obligations and family commitments, all while challenging cultural norms about women's leadership, inspired me to choose a career in teaching. The divergent encounters of my sister and my sister underscore the intricate interaction between gender, cultural norms, and career ambitions, offering a deeper comprehension of women's obstacles in leadership positions.

My career in education, beginning as a primary-level teacher and advancing to vice-principal, has given me direct observations of the gender prejudices that exist in educational institutions. My observation of the lack of women in important leadership roles and personal experiences of gender-based discrimination has strengthened my dedication to promoting gender equality in education. My research emphasizes the obstacles female head teachers encounter, specifically from the standpoint of transformational leadership.

I embrace an interpretive epistemological perspective for this study, acknowledging that knowledge is subjective and formed via social interactions. The data-gathering approach includes conducting comprehensive interviews with open-ended questions, enabling participants to express their experiences and viewpoints. This approach is consistent with my conviction on the significance of comprehending the experiences of female head teachers to reveal the complex array of difficulties they encounter.

As a researcher, I manage and understand the power dynamics inherent in the study process. Due to my education and middle-class status, people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds may see me differently. It is crucial to be aware of these factors and make an effort to establish an atmosphere characterized by trust and respect when gathering data. Maintaining confidentiality and obtaining informed permission are essential ethical issues that respect the dignity and autonomy of participants.

Reflexivity is a crucial component of my research methodology, which entails ongoing introspection of how my own identity and past experiences impact my interactions with participants and interpretation of findings. My support for gender equality and dedication to educational leadership shape my analysis using the frameworks of transformational leadership theory and liberal feminist theory. These theoretical frameworks provide a systematic method for comprehending the difficulties encountered by female head teachers while also recognizing the impact of social and institutional systems.

Ensuring transparency in recording my study observations and identifying any possible biases is essential for upholding the integrity of the research. By transparently expressing my positionality, I aim to provide a distinct framework for my interpretations and maintain the research process's responsibility and reliability.

My viewpoint as a researcher is influenced by my personal and professional experiences, my conviction in gender equality, and my dedication to educational leadership. The variables above shape my methodology in examining the obstacles encountered by female principals in the Lalitpur district. By embracing an interpretive perspective, placing ethical concerns at the forefront, and practicing self-awareness, I aim to carry out considerate, comprehensive, and impactful research. This research seeks to

enhance our comprehension of the structural obstacles hindering women from attaining leadership positions while advocating for constructive reforms within educational establishments.

Statement of the Problem

I have witnessed the under-representation of women in key leadership positions in the school education sector (i.e., Department head, Principal, Coordinator, Administrator) in those organizations where I worked as a teacher and H.R. head in the corporate hospital (elaborated my experience in Chapter I, under Scene Setting).

Flash Report (2021/22) shows that only 17% of females in the secondary level (9-10) and 12.4% of females in the higher secondary level (11-12) represent all over the country as teachers. Similarly, 6,686 nationwide samples were taken where only 1,166 women, i.e., just 17.4 percent, are in secondary-level head teacher positions (Flash Report 2018/19). Likewise, Bagmati province is the country's most developed and literate province, with only 24.24 percent of women represented at the secondary level and 14.16 percent at the higher secondary level. Similarly, in the proposed research area, i.e., Lalitpur district, around 25 percent of women represent the secondary level, and around 38 percent represent the higher secondary level (Flash Report, 2021/22). It can further be estimated that women's representation in other less developed and with fewer literacy rates bearing provinces. Unfortunately, there are fewer possibilities of becoming a female head teacher/principal at the secondary and higher secondary levels since their representation is nominal. It is compelling that the chances of qualifying women as leaders are further restricted because fewer women get selected for the competition. While collecting the facts, in the Lalitpur Metropolitan City, women representation in the position of head teacher is 25 percent, i.e., only ten women out of 40 positions in public schools where only three women in secondary level and private schools just 28.33 percent, i.e., only 68 women out of 240 positions of women representation altogether pre-primary, basic and secondary level schools (Education Bulletin, 2078/079).

Therefore, I have addressed this as 'inadequate representation' rather than 'under-representation. The Nepalese Constitution recognizes and addresses women's under-representation, providing 33 percent of women representation as mandatory (Constitution of Nepal 2072). Hence, women's under-representation is well established based on facts

and existing provisions in the Nepalese Constitution. Unfortunately, there is no mechanism to confirm the implementation of the constitutional provision.

If we overlook the challenges women face right from school education to the leadership selection process after completing their studies, most women get defeated by the challenges they face in the beginning due to the conventional mindset of society. Al-Jaradat (2014) indicated in his research that women leaders encountered physical challenges most frequently, closely followed by workplace difficulties, which may create barriers to career enhancement as academic leaders. Elmuti et al. (2009) mentioned in their study that women face challenges in the selection process, workplace relationships, globalization, negative perception, and stereotyping as organizational barriers in leadership positions. It is a particular issue for developing countries like Nepal since it relates to human rights, natural justice, inclusiveness, and other social concerns. Bass et al. (1996) highlight that women lead the institution differently as they are more democratic, collaborative, and participative. I have also closely observed the leadership style of women headteachers, who handle their role in a transformational way, but there are still fewer females in the head teacher position. Does gender determine leadership ability?

Women face challenges of discouragement by society as head teachers due to the nature of their work. By nature, women are caring, kind to others, sensitive, team members, relation-orientated, and better evaluated for empathy, which is assumed to be excellent leadership in practice. However, due to human nature, sometimes employees disobey that type of nature, which might have failed her leadership. Traditionally, the most appreciated leadership was accepted as masculine (Radu et al., 2017), and people are still used to this trend. Nijat and Murtazashvili (2015) highlight that women who struggle to achieve leadership face challenges in day-to-day work life: lack of political and financial support and inadequate decision-making authority. Helterban and Rieg (2004) also found that the negative perception of people taking women as a caregiver has created challenges to achieving success as a head teacher. In our society, girls are taught to be polite, social, and responsible for handling household work rather than extra activities, enhancing self-confidence and knowledge. As Hacifazlioglu (2010) also mentions, balancing family and professional responsibilities is an unavoidable challenge

for women. Does it begin with the family not trusting the females in leading positions? Is personal responsibility a barrier to achieving the leading position of school head teacher? Or is it due to the lack of confidence, as Shepherd (2017) has stated in his study, that women's lack of confidence to tackle leadership positions is also one of the reasons for less participation in such positions?

Women head teachers are intense, persistent, and transforming role models for other women in the school context. Helterbran and Rieg (2004) mention in their study that a societal myth is that ‘women head teachers’ cannot discipline older male students. People believe that a male is an appropriate selection for the post of head teacher because of handling the situation in case a fight breaks out. Women are usually viewed as kind, modest, and naturally able to handle difficulties. (Silva & Mendis, 2017). Everyone is different, and women are also different by nature. Women are usually kindhearted by nature since, from an early age, they are taught to be tolerant, kind, soft-spoken, and humble among elders and society (Olsson & Martiny, 2018). However, because of their maternal qualities and kindness, women commonly hold a secondary role in traditional male-dominated society. Similarly, in the Nepalese context, women's qualities are seen as a drawback when holding a leadership position, even if they enable women to communicate their roles effectively.

The lack of adequate participation of women in important leadership roles within the school education system is a widespread problem in Nepal. Notwithstanding constitutional requirements for gender parity, women notably lack leadership positions such as head teachers. This issue is apparent in national statistics and in localized data from the Lalitpur area, where women constitute a minority of head teacher posts in both public and private schools. Moreover, cultural beliefs and gender stereotypes intensify the difficulties women encounter in pursuing success in leadership roles within the school system. Conventional gender roles often result in women being seen as caretakers rather than authoritative leaders, obstructing their progress in leadership positions. In addition, women face obstacles such as insufficient support, limited decision-making power, and difficulties managing family and work duties. The enduring presence of patriarchal structures and cultural norms intensifies these difficulties, resulting in an intricate setting for women aspiring to attain leadership positions in the field of education. The patriarchal

system exists in Nepal, with various cultures, ethnicities, and religions, where the women might be dominated by men or women themselves and face the challenges to achieve the position of head teacher and in a leadership role, which is needed to study for equal treatment.

Changing yourself is the first step towards changing the world. Regarding being a competent head teacher, women can be an inspiration, a role model, and a problem solver because of their friendly attitude. She may successfully lead the school by utilizing her abilities and work habits if given the opportunity. Women who hold leadership positions experience personal growth and transformation, eventually influencing other women who aspire to hold similar positions. The qualities of women and the components of transformational leadership are intertwined and support in leading a school. Since women are generally perceived as being friendly, kind, and helpful, dimensions of transformational leadership also focus on empowering, inspiring, and giving followers more attention so they are encouraged to develop personally and professionally (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Hence, women who possess transformational leadership qualities can inspire and motivate their subordinates to commit to the institution by supporting their fundamental values related to achieving goals (Avolio et al., 2004, as cited in Ismail et al., 2021). Nevertheless, in the context of Nepal, questions arise as to why women are still taken as followers only. How difficult is it for women to hold the head teacher position in schools? It is important to carefully investigate how she could transform herself as a woman head teacher and empower others as a role model, inspirer, or critical thinker beyond the challenges. To put another stone in the road of women's empowerment.

Purpose of the Study

This research explores the stories of women head teachers in their professional, social, and individual contexts. In doing so, the study was focused on transformational leadership. The transformation of women headteachers is the result of transformational leadership.

Research Questions

1. How do women head teachers experience professional, social, and individual challenges in becoming head teachers?

2. How do women head teachers effectively practice basic dimensions of transformational leadership in their professional, social, and individual contexts?

The Rationale of the Study

One of the critical topics for discussion and debate is women in leadership. Studies on women in leadership roles have been the subject of numerous investigations, but very little research has been done on the struggle of women headteachers in Nepal and how it relates to their leadership style. Similarly, this investigation focused on the difficulties women school head teachers faced to achieve and after achieving the head teacher position. Women currently hold higher-level positions in education but still fewer than men. Adhikari and Adhikari (2021) found that having meaningful representation of women in school governance will likely reduce governance issues such as absenteeism, low parental involvement, inadequate resource mobilization, transparency, and accountability, which shows that women can contribute significantly to good governance in school administration.

Even after being appointed, women in higher positions are still not entirely accepted in our society. Similarly, Martin (2011) stated that in the early 1900s, women were kept out of leadership positions due to male dominance, and there was the belief that men were leaders and women were natural followers. In developing countries like Nepal, appointing men in leading positions remains the trend. I have seen quite a few women leading educational organizations during my teaching career, whereas the female population is more than half, and the government of Nepal provides 33 percent of the reservation. Thus, the government is not concerned about the follow-up for implementing a gender-based strategy. Even feminism-based strategies were considered ineffective regarding leadership positions. Therefore, I was keenly interested in exploring the stories of women head teachers. Similarly, the findings of this study were expected to have substantial implications concerning the educational authority for improving academic quality and the status of women.

Further, I could not access the literature on women's perspectives reaching the top leading position. Therefore, this study explored the stories of women head teachers and their success in acquiring leading positions and transformation by overcoming challenging situations. The study's findings are genuine voices of the head teachers,

which will help us to understand women's leadership and how women head teachers suffered with the challenges in their daily lives on a social, professional, and personal level. Therefore, this study's results can be helpful to all those women who aspire to be head teachers in the present-day context of society. It could further help to follow an effective leadership style to lead the school. Similarly, it may be instrumental in further studying women's empowerment and leadership development areas connected to effective administration.

Delimitation of the Study

I have delimited my study focusing on women leaders' individual, social, and professional underpinnings in their experience, where the individual aspect had delimited in educational qualification, experience, and self-confidence, the social aspect in family support and professional aspect has been delimited in leadership style. While exploring the leadership styles of the women head teachers, I have focused on the idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration of transformational leadership.

Essence of Chapter

This chapter provided an overview of my research and the rationale behind it. I gave the justification for carrying out this investigation. As a woman in education, I encountered numerous obstacles and saw relatively few other women in leadership roles. I noted how, in the different organizations I had worked for, I had observed a dearth of women in leadership positions, which I attributed to societal biases and a dearth of chances for women. In addition, I discussed how women's participation as leaders was marginally higher in primary and pre-primary education than in secondary and upper secondary education. In addition, I noted that women were underrepresented in leadership roles in public schools, despite their equal qualifications and abilities, and that they were limited to middle management posts. Similarly, I have presented the purpose of the study, the research question, and the significance of the study.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter deals with a literature review of women's leadership in the academic sector, the underrepresentation of women as leaders, challenges of women in professional, social, and individual contexts as in academic leadership positions, and existing policies about women's academic leadership in Nepal. It tries to review the literature based on thematic, theoretical, policy, and empirical points of view.

Women's Leadership in Education

Educational leadership is persuading others to achieve mutually agreed educational purposes. In this line, Wolverton and Gmelch (2002) have defined academic leadership as preparing a community of scholars to achieve everyday purposes through empowering faculty members. Both people who would be considered leaders and people who would be called followers are thought to participate in the community process of leadership. In some situations, leaders can act like followers, and followers can act like leaders, but leaders cannot function without followers (Ladkin, 2010). In the context of Nepal, Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (2074), a head teacher's responsibilities include Ensuring the environment, discipline, and quality of education are maintained, coordinating and collaborating with parents, students, staff, and teachers, sustaining, monitoring, and enhancing the school's administrative and academic operations and establishing and upholding the duties and roles of teachers and other staff members.

In organizational settings, gender roles that influence female leaders' behavior, compared with male leaders, may be dealt with softly by nature. Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) also believe in differences between men's and women's leading nature. They add that male leaders are more autocratic and task-oriented, whereas female leaders are democratic and relationship-oriented. Similarly, Southworth (2002) explains that school leaders generally regard their responsibilities with dilemmas, dualities, and tensions. There may not be a different or more powerful leadership style for males and females to lead a particular organization. Women's leadership style has evolved to be

flexible, people-oriented, and innovative. Besides all these, there are differences in the vision of women's leadership (Radu et al., 2017). Regarding women in leadership roles, Nepalese society does not have many opportunities. According to Search for Common Ground and Governance Facility (2017), the nation's discriminatory social structure and norms for women's empowerment are primarily responsible for this.

The socially constructed qualities of men, women, girls, and boys are referred to as gender, which is different from culture to culture and can evolve (WHO, 2024). Gender roles impact how people approach issues, including assuming leadership positions. There is a significant relationship between gender and leadership, which needs to be considered to promote effective organizational operations. Despite the apparent similarities in how given tasks are carried out, society views men as superior to women leaders in several areas. Fundamentally, both sexes can bring about change and inspire others to follow their lead to accomplish predetermined goals and objectives. Understanding a leader's attributes and personality has been the foundation for developing the concept of leadership over time (Bush & Middlewood, 2013). However, contemporary leadership approaches have shifted their focus from a leader's attributes and personality qualities to their behaviors. This helped me to comprehend that qualities may be transformed into behaviors to establish leadership. Similarly, Zenger and Folkman (2012) contend that the capacity for leadership roles is unaffected by gender. In addition, as a vice principal, I concur that women leaders exhibit more democratic and transformative leadership compared to male leaders in the same circumstances.

Leadership entails taking all necessary steps to achieve a common goal, including deciding on a vision, outlining goals, allocating resources, and assessing effectiveness. Educational leaders require new guidelines to direct their actions and effectively carry out their tasks, whether men or women.

Underrepresentation of Women in Leadership Positions

Women are underrepresented globally in different social services, mainly in senior positions. Oplatka and Hertz-Lazarowitz (2006) stated evidence of underrepresentation in well-developed countries like the U.S. and U.K. during the 1970s and 1980s. Smith (2002) presented that women are under-represented in academic leadership positions because of their stereotyped role in families, as they considered that

they might not devote themselves to the areas as men do. Women are compelled to prioritize their family responsibilities, resulting in less involvement in different leadership enhancement programs.

A head teacher's roles and responsibilities include ensuring the environment, discipline, and quality of education are maintained; coordinating and cooperating with parents, students, staff, and teachers; maintaining, monitoring, and improving the school's academic and administrative operations; and establishing and upholding the roles and duties of teachers and other staff members (The Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, 2074). Women head teachers can handle all these responsibilities better because they prioritize upholding positive relationships and terms with their teams. Many disciplines have undergone changes and transformations, and women are becoming more prominent as school leaders because they have the knowledge and skills to thoroughly analyze the circumstances and create solutions to improve them (Kapur, 2018). Although many women leaders are trying to break down the barriers society has created, many women leaders are capable and competent in enhancing their leadership roles equally (Bell, 2017).

Women do not fall behind due to less or no capabilities but due to the gender-based cultural setting of the societies (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007). However, Helterbran and Rieg (2004) have stated that due to the lack of women's role models in the position of head teachers, women teachers bear less confidence to lead a school as head teachers. According to the CEO of the Victorian Academy of Australia, who has extensive experience in the field, while the percentage of women in leadership roles in the academic sector has increased, only 44% of executive principals and 56% of principals in Victoria are female. However, women comprise 76% of government teachers (Victorian Academy, 8 March 2023). Similarly, according to the UGC report (2019/2020), 86.73 percent of male teachers and 13.26 percent of female teachers are in higher education. The above indicates that the representation of women in the head teacher position is lower than that of males. Compared to male involvement, female participation in school leadership is quite low.

The above report highlights women's low participation in academic leadership positions worldwide, and Nepal is no exception. However, a severe issue is to deal with.

Although according to the UN Women Report (2018-2019), there has been a substantial improvement in the status of women in leadership, with many of them holding positions granted by the constitution. Nevertheless, there is still less representation of women in the head teacher position. Underrepresentation might be the effect of challenges faced by women beforehand in their professional careers.

Individual, Social, and Professional Context of Women Head Teachers

The distinct environment of women headteachers results from the complex collaboration of individual experiences, social norms, and organizational dynamics. In the context of women head teachers, all these factors are related to professional, social, and individual perspectives. Because these three contexts are evident to society, one can feel the impact made by the women head teachers. This context of women headteachers includes various elements that impact their leadership ideas, career advancement, and work-life balance.

The individual context of women headteachers encompasses women's values concerning their professional aspirations and abilities. I observe how discrimination and cultural beliefs have impacted women's confidence and career advancement, which I have explored in my scene setting. Since people not directly impacted by them frequently fail to see them, these imperceptible challenges can be very harmful. These challenges could have a significant impact on a woman's career enhancement. Making a balance between school and family responsibilities is challenging for women. Women are expected to do the majority of work inside the home, which decreases their motivation to enhance their professional capabilities and job opportunities as head teachers (Shakeshaft, 1989). Goeller (1995) suggested that the role of a mother and leadership position is incompatible with managing the long working hours, which is the barrier to an influential role as headteacher.

Women who receive an education are nurtured and given the abilities and chances to become leaders in any institution. We must evaluate women's educational attainment before supporting women in leadership roles. According to the CBS (2021), Nepal's literacy rate is 76.2 percent, 83.6 percent of men and 69.4 percent of women. In the same way, the gender distribution at the basic, secondary, and bachelor's levels seems to be balanced. However, at the master's level, the proportion of male students is 8

percent higher, and only 16 and 17 percent of students are female in M.Phil and Ph.D, respectively (UGC, 2018/19). This status indicates unambiguously the significant disparity in educational attainment between men and women. Therefore, a question arises: How do women attain leadership roles in education when they encounter a significantly lower equal opportunity to receive a quality education?

Our socio-cultural beliefs come under the social context, which influences our everyday conduct and unknowingly determines the enhancement of women head teachers. For women to have successful careers, they must be inspired to take the lead and maintain their positions of head teacher in the face of struggle (Gupton, 2009). According to Helterbran and Rieg (2004), women are still seen as primary caretakers. If women are given more exposure as the head teacher, society assumes that women neglect family responsibility. Whenever men devote several evenings to school or community work, society takes it as part of their job or responsibility Eakle (1995). In the same way, Morley and Crossouard (2015) found the negative belief of society that women should not be authoritative over men, and they also found that critical family support creates obstacles to achieving leadership positions. Likewise, Dunshea (1998) observed another challenge to women in their study: society's assumption toward hardworking female headteachers is that they got their post for being women but not by their capabilities, so they attend various meetings in off-duty time.

In the context of Nepal, women live different lives than men. They probably behave responsibly and with compassion for their family. Laws and social conventions impose restrictions on women. They are supposed to be restricted to household duties and treated as caregivers. According to Shrestha and Gartaula (2015), women's rights and opportunities in society have never been equal to men. Family and society discriminate against women based on gender. Women should feed the family's elders, male members, and children first and eat last. They should also serve their male family members first because they view men as the family's breadwinners (Shrestha & Gartaula, 2015), indicating that social norms constrain women and that even they live according to societal norms. Such an idea is becoming a significant barrier for women seeking leadership positions.

Headteachers are in the role of supervising, mentoring, and inspiring other faculty members. While teaching is often a female occupation, school management is considered a male domain (Bayir & Donmez, 2020). Women's maternal, loving, and caring behaviors only earned them a middle-level position. In the context of Nepal, there is an underrepresentation of women in the post of head teacher, which I have explained in the statement of the problem. In the long run, women have made significant progress in education. Angur Baba Joshi is a social worker and Nepal's first female head teacher (1932-2020). She was the first woman to graduate from college. Research shows that women suffered discrimination over gender, ethnicity, and sex roles for centuries. Women leaders were assessed differently and less favorably than men even when exhibiting the same leadership behaviors, as Eagly (1987) stated. Women were prevented from holding administrative positions because of the male dominance view that men were leaders and women were natural followers in the early 1900s (Martin, 2011). The viewpoints assumed for women have not yet been transformed. Women principals need to strike a balance between their personal and professional lives. Helterbran and Rieg (2004) mention in their study that a societal myth is that female head teachers cannot discipline older male students. People believe that a male is an appropriate selection for the post of head teacher because of handling the situation in case a fight breaks out.

Similarly, women are facing challenges in the appointment process. Johns (2013) found that the gender-biased behavior of the selectors and bias in the selection process were sex differences. The most common barrier was an unfavorable selection process applied by the companies, which initially restricted career advancement chances in their profession. Elmuti et al. (2009) opined that the eligible women pool for promotion to executive positions is relatively small, so there are few promotions to the leading position. The other barriers are differences in wages and the stereotypical mindset of males toward women leaders' decision-making capacities, which I have shared my own experience in Chapter I. Eagly and Carli (2007) also pointed out a simple comparison of the average wages of full-time workers of women and men in 2005 in the USA, and the study's findings indicate that men's income is more than women's. Although men and women have similar capabilities and job titles, this wage gap exists.

Johns (2013) adds that workplace bias manifests itself in a variety of ways, including disparaging comments and gestures, disregard and disrespect of an individual's contribution, exclusion from informal and formal networking opportunities, unfair performance evaluations, denial of promotions or advancement, different treatment from peers, and limited access to information and resources that eventually and negatively affect the individual's ability to perform successfully. Women face unfriendly organizational behavior, gender-based discrimination, violence, lack of authority, and inferior institutional support for career development training on higher education campuses in patriarchal cultures (Morley & Crossouard, 2015). They add that women do not have confidence in decision-making as male leaders do in masculine leadership style, although Coleman (2003) argued that women lead the institutions more collaboratively and democratically. Globalization presents new challenges for women. A female leader at the senior level finds it hard to relocate herself after a transfer or deputation made in her organization, which is part and partial to professional missions. Where she is supposed to perform and prove her competency, it leads her to quit the opportunities she got because of her working spouse and the education of her children or family issues, which presents a significant barrier for many women with families and a working spouse or other family members (Wellington et al., 2003).

The literature above indicates that some of the leading causes of the low number of women in the post of head teachers are the imbalance between characteristics of leadership, the traditional approach, and gender disparity in the workplace, society, and women themselves.

Policy Review

In Nepal, more than half (51.04%) of the population is covered by females, and the total literacy rate of Nepal is 76.3, where females are only 69.4 percent, while the male literacy rate is 83.6 percent (CBS, 2021). Equal access to quality education for women is essential to representing themselves in different sectors, including the educational leadership arena. In the context of Nepal, the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) under the Ministry of Education (MoE) has set the goal of ensuring equal access to quality education for all marginalized groups, including women. That can be the trigger to increase women's participation in the educational profession. Similarly, the

Education for All (EFA) goal focuses on girl children and women to increase equitable access to appropriate learning, literacy, and skills, which are the base for achieving leadership roles in education (Source: SSDP, 2016; EFA 2002).

Similarly, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Department of Women Development of the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare developed and implemented a Nepal-Gender Equality and Empowerment project between 2002 -2013. Together, these institutions worked to eliminate gender biases and gender inequality, empowering women by providing equal employment opportunities in existing and increasing institutions by promoting women. (ADB, 2016). Likewise, to empower women globally, the Beijing Conference (1995) declared some policies regarding women's right to equal opportunity, access to power and position, and inclusiveness of women at all levels to foster women empowerment, equal treatment, promote economic independence, and bring in implementation (UN,1996).

The Constitution of Nepal includes providing thirty-three percent of women's quota to the different sectors, including the academic profession. No person shall discriminate on the grounds of one's origin, religion, ethnicity, gender, language, region, ideology, or similar other grounds; a female Judge shall be entitled to a maternity leave of a maximum of Ninety-Eight days, with remuneration, before and after delivery, maternity leave may be taken only for two times during the entire service period. The Constitution of Nepal and The Labor Act (2074) have made it mandatory to establish a childcare center where 50 or more working women must provide an additional 30-minute break for breastfeeding and pregnant women. It provides fifteen days of mourning leave to the women employee in case of the husband, own parents (father and mother), and in-laws (father-in-law and mother-in-law) death. It is mandatory to avail of maternity leave in case of stillbirth or miscarriage for working women.

The School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) helps increase women's meaningful access and participation as head teachers in schools for a meaningful outcome, as this plan seeks to improve educational quality by incorporating and involving all marginalized groups. Similarly, sustainable development goal (SDG) no 5 is the gender equity goal, which aims to eradicate gender discrimination against all females everywhere, eliminate all kinds of violence related to women and wage discrimination,

and ensure women's equal participation and decision-making opportunities. In addition, SDGs aim to include women in the technology sector to empower women. It targets the adoption and strengthening of effective policies and appropriate legislation for gender equality and the empowerment of women at all levels (SSDP, 2016). A right to receive free education up to the secondary level is included in the Education Policy (2019). Equal access to education for all shows equal rights for quality education, even to every girl child. Similarly, the monitoring indicators for implementing the right to education as specified in this act shall be developed by the Ministry of the Government of Nepal, responsible for education issues (Government of Nepal, 2018). Likewise, to increase the participation of women, Government of Nepal (2022/23-2032/33) includes gender program responsive budgeting for the promotion of gender equity, selection of teachers from marginalized groups applying through quotas, and at least one woman must be selected among the members of the school management committee.

After reviewing the policy, we see that women's empowerment is mentioned in our plans and policies, but it is only a catchphrase in practice. Although we had specific plans and policies for women's empowerment, their execution was still lacking. It may be clinched that women's under-representation in the positions of head teacher exists, and those who are already working in the positions of head teacher still face many challenges even after formulating or addressing the rights of women in the different laws, policies, and the constitution.

Theoretical Review

Reviewed literature shows the underrepresentation of women in school leadership positions because of gender-based challenges. Women's participation in senior positions in education is affected by social, individual, and organizational challenges linked with patriarchal practices, gender stereotyping, and guilt related to the dual responsibility of managing personal and professional responsibilities at a time, which block the way of women to achieve the senior position in education (Komiti, 2020). The underrepresentation of women is one of the challenges women face in academic leadership. Similarly, despite women's leadership style being more collaborative, socially sensitive, helpful, and democratic than their male counterparts (Bass et al., 1996), the number of women head teachers at the secondary level is nominal. Moreover, those

qualities are closely associated with transformational leadership (Jogulu & Wood, 2006). The above-mentioned transformational leadership qualities have been found mostly in women head teachers, and the researcher supports the statement. Therefore, to accomplish the challenges and opportunities of women head teachers in school, I reviewed theories based on the unequal distribution of rights and justice because Reeves et al. (2008) explain that theories provide different lenses for the researcher to see and understand the complicated problems or social issues and help to focus on different aspects of the research process. Therefore, the theories in this study helped me understand the problems' context. As this study is around women's issues and their role in transformational perspectives, I have used the lenses of transformational leadership theory and liberal feminist theory to understand and explore the stories of Nepali women head teachers in the academic arena.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Burns introduced transformational leadership theory in 1978 in his book Leadership, which was developed by Bass further in 1985 (Bass, 1998). This theory mainly focuses on the relationship between leaders and followers to achieve the common goal of an organization (Burns, 1978). Bass and Riggio (2006) believe that transformational leaders empower and motivate their followers to achieve higher performance and are committed and satisfy their followers. They added that transformational leaders pay more attention to the follower's needs and help them with personal development by empowering them. Similarly, this theory believes in the potentiality of a leader to empower and encourage the followers to bring positive change to an organization (Peeke, 2003). Burns (1978) found transformational leaders who always appreciated and recognized the potential in their followers. Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) found that the theory is more suitable for overcoming the current challenges facing the educational leaders of the institutions. The core message of this theory is that influential leaders can always make their followers actively achieve the goal of an organization with their personal development.

Bass and Riggio (2006) describe the four components of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Leaders should do the right thing in idealized influence and

demonstrate more ethical and moral conduct. It shows the leaders as role models who always help and are devoted to their organization and employees' welfare. In inspirational motivation, leaders inspire the followers around them to perform higher in the group by making them understand the meaning and challenges of their roles. In intellectual stimulation, leaders always encourage and stimulate their followers to be creative and innovative. Likewise, individualized consideration emphasizes that leaders always mentor each individual for their personal growth and development and pay more attention to the follower's needs. Therefore, with this theory, I want to reveal the leadership qualities despite being underprivileged in the Nepali societal construct of women head teachers in school.

In this regard of women's leadership and transformational leadership, Eagly et al. (2003) have reported that transformational leadership is feminine. Women are supposed to be more collaborative, democratic, and attached to interpersonal relations than their male counterparts. It is contested and defended with the help of the published literature mentioned above. That is also supported by Coleman (2003), who discusses that transformational leaders and female leaders are positively interrelated. However, Lyons (1996) found unilateral differences in transformational leadership between female and male leaders. Likewise, Powell (1990) stated that transformational leadership is supposed to be a gender-balanced leadership style. The researcher is of the opinion that gender-balanced leadership is a part of transformational leadership.

Therefore, I borrowed this transformational leadership theory, which helped me to understand women's leadership style and its connection to the challenges of women leaders in the school. Furthermore, Banerji and Krishnan (2000) stated that this theory advocates for achieving the school's goal and provides opportunities mainly for women. Similarly, Silva and Mendis (2017) have stated that transformative leadership theory directs the traits that women leaders present in the workplace. Therefore, the theory was relevant to the study because it could help explain how women leaders have perceived their leadership journeys, articulate the difficulties they have faced as women in public schools, and explain how they present themselves to justify their positions of authority.

However, I felt that transformational leadership theory alone cannot explore the role and challenges. So, I depicted the theory related to gender biases, the liberal feminist theory, as the assistance theory, which contributed equally to understanding the issue.

Feminist Theory

According to Walvy (2011), feminism is a movement to reduce gender inequality and advance women's interests. Further, Walvy adds that feminism is about the emancipation of women from certain boundaries that help them access education, employment, social activities, and political representation. There are different types of feminism theory, including the first, second, third, and fourth waves. First-wave feminism was developed between the 19th and early 20th centuries, and it fought for rights based on racism, property rights, and the right to vote. The second wave began with the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex' in 1949 in France. Then, between the 1970s and 1980s, feminists concentrated and raised their voices regarding the issues related to the equal right to workplace representation and concern regarding dominance by men in the profession, reproductive rights, and equal rights in political representation. The Third wave of feminism began to respond to the failure and criticism of the second wave. In which they reject the belief that women are oppressed only by males. This movement started dealing with women-related issues internationally (Lorber, 2001). Similarly, according to Jain (2020), The 'Everyday Sexism Project,' an online project started in 2012 by British feminist author Laura Bates, is one of many online campaigns that signaled the start of the fourth wave of feminism. It has inspired tens of thousands of women worldwide to write about the sexual harassment, employment discrimination, and body shaming that they experience daily.

The same type of incidence has been experienced by Nepalese women, and Nepalese head teachers are also not the exception. Hence, the theory seems applicable and relevant to women's head teacher's journey to leadership. The feminist theory directly applies to the social aspect of facing challenges by the women head teachers.

Liberal Feminism

As there is a different understanding of feminism, there is different feminist theory. Feminist theory is considered the family of critical theories (Sharma, 2019). Lorber (2001) has named three basic types of feminisms to solve gender inequality:

gender reform feminisms, gender resistance feminism, and gender rebellion feminisms. Among the three types of feminism, gender reform feminism includes liberal feminism, Marxist and Socialist feminism, and post-colonial feminism, which want women to be equally valued as men and live their lives according to human potential. Among the theories under gender reform feminism, Beasley (1999) writes that liberal theory argues that women face artificial barriers in public positions and are treated unequally. This study also explores the stories of women related to the challenges in the position of the public world; therefore, to understand the barriers linked with gender biases in the context of Nepal, the liberal theory was used in this study.

This study is supported by liberal feminist theory to understand the issues based on gender discrimination. According to Bailey (2016), liberal feminism emerged from political philosophy as women's natural right to liberty and emerged into the worldview during the 17th and 18th centuries. This theory aims to make women participate in leadership positions and show society's discriminatory behavior towards women (Lorber, 2010). That means this theory demands equal rights and opportunities for men and women (Mannathoko, 1992). Furthermore, Effiong (2020) observes that liberal feminist believes that all humans are equal and they all should have equal opportunities in the political, public, and employment rights.

In Nepal, women are underrepresented in the post of head teacher, and Blackmore (1999) adds that the reason for low presentation in education is bias in recruitment and promotion, which is a challenge for women in achieving leadership positions. Most leadership positions are given to males with good pay, authority for decision-making, and command in patriarchal countries (Lorber, 2001) like Nepal.

I have considered the liberal feminist theory to be fitting because it helps to understand the issue that comes in the way of women's achievement in leadership positions. From the lenses of this theory, I saw how this discussion, equal rights to women, is relevant in Nepal's context regarding the challenges women headteachers face. However, this study is not to challenge the patriarchal system; it is only to operate women effectively as a head teacher by removing the barriers, and liberal feminism also advocates about the gender equality in the public sphere, such as equal access to education, equal pay, and better working conditions (Ansari, 2023). Therefore, this study

borrowed the lens from liberal feminism to strengthen the understanding of the challenges of women head teachers in the school context.

This theory helps to explain the challenging journey that women have to endure in order to become head teachers in school. I have used liberal feminism theory to talk about how discrimination against women head teachers in the workplace is related to their gender, level of education, ability to balance work and personal life, and support from their families. Similarly, I have employed the idea of liberal feminism to understand how equal opportunities within the family, in society, and the workplace contribute to a rise in the number of women holding the position of head teacher. The study has been centered on how women leaders articulate their positions as leaders in society while coping with their personal, professional, and social contexts related to gender bias and sexism in the workplace. In this study, multiple forms of oppression that women faced, as well as social justice and gender equality, are discussed.

Empirical Review

Many studies on women leaders reveal their different stories in the journey of leadership positions. Research in Afghanistan by Nijat and Murtazashivil (2015) found that women are underrepresented in leadership positions due to gender inequality, and those already in it are also perceived as weak in decision-making. Similarly, they found that women are not even active in economic production despite heavy investment to empower them nationally and internationally. Similarly, to better understand the difficulties female head teachers face in rural South Africa, Sinyosi and Potokri (2021) conducted research. Their findings indicate that the main obstacles are lack of cooperation, disrespect, ill-discipline, teachers' unwillingness to learn, and negative attitudes from the teachers. They also mention gender discrimination and societal stereotypes. Likewise, Al-Jaradat (2014) stated that women mainly face physical and organizational challenges in a leadership position in school as out of 187 respondents, 73.4% responded, followed by physical challenges, and 68.4% responded by organizational challenges. The study was conducted with eleven participants, and they recognized staff resistance and work-life balance as the two main obstacles to effective educational leadership. Participants in the study concluded that racism and sexism are the

significant obstacles keeping African American females from holding the position of assistant principal or principal of a school (Jackson-Dunn, 2018).

Similarly, according to Morley and Crossouard (2016), lack of investment in women, family obligations, the perception of leadership, organizational culture, social caste, and culture are among the obstacles to women's leadership. According to their empirical investigation, women have not yet been recognized as leaders or prepared for leadership roles. The study's primary outcome was that leadership practices and policies that promote greater involvement of both genders in leadership must be revised. As of 2013, only 45% of head teacher positions in Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries were held by female teachers, despite representing 68% of the teaching population on average in secondary school (OECD, 2012). In the same way, the majority of females who achieved the position of school head teacher also experienced discrimination, harassment, sexism, and a lack of support from family and coworkers at work (Ndlovu & Proches, 2019).

The government has worked hard to establish a school atmosphere that welcomes girls, but this goal has not been accomplished due to the sociocultural mindset and discriminatory attitudes of parents (Khatri, 2022). Meanwhile, Subedi and Shrestha (2023) conducted a study in the Kathmandu Valley where they discovered that women academic leaders face obstacles such as biased images based on gender despite playing an influential leadership role. They viewed integrity, professionalism, positivity, and enthusiasm as the cornerstones of developing coping mechanisms and succeeding as a leader. After reviewing past studies, the most alarming situations faced by women head teachers are found to be discrimination, bias, underrepresentation, and lack of opportunities.

Headteachers significantly influence the course for school reform (Fisher, 2020), either male or female. Maintaining a high standard of education and fostering a healthy learning environment in the school setting fall within their purview. According to Brinkmann et al. (2021), effectively managing teachers, staff, and infrastructures within the constraints of available resources is essential for head teachers to succeed on the job. Higher academic success and institutional development are directly correlated with improved leadership. Adhikari (2024) asserts that most government-aided schools in

Nepal are poorly run. It is generally accepted that head teachers' leadership is crucial to changing these types of schools. The findings of his study demonstrated how head teachers' transformative leadership qualities have influenced today's transformed schools. On the other hand, Ghimire (2022) collected data from 36 head teachers of secondary-level schools in the Lalitpur district and found that head teachers are correctly implementing transformational leadership approaches in the Lalitpur district for the advancement of an educational institution.

Since the focus of my research was on the challenges women encounter in obtaining and carrying out the role of the head teacher from a transformational leadership viewpoint, I read the literature to acquire a global perspective on the situation of women headteachers in educational settings. The literature presented above revealed the numerous obstacles that women still face in social, professional, and personal contexts. Similarly, the results of a previous study showed that most head teachers in the Lalitpur district used transformational leadership.

Identification of Research Gap

I reviewed the other literature concerning the selected research title and the topical issues related to women's involvement in different sectors, including secondary-level school head teachers. The selected literature has provided comprehensive information and the appropriate tract. I want to learn more about the experiences of women head teachers. According to Khatri (2022), the government of Nepal has developed strategies to empower women through education for girls, but because there are no clear rules in place, women continue to be laid back. According to Subedi and Shrestha (2023), the leading cause of their difficulties was the gender-based norms that were dominant in the society in which they had been living. However, I found no concern focused on why women are not involved as head teachers, and I could not access the findings on challenges faced by women head teachers from the transformational perspective in the Nepalese context. The movements and the discussions that took place over various periods have significantly alerted the theoretical ideas of feminism, but in practice, societal standards and values still suppress women. The underrepresentation of women in headteacher positions and academic leadership roles further demonstrates the gap between social practice and the theoretical framework of feminism. Even educated

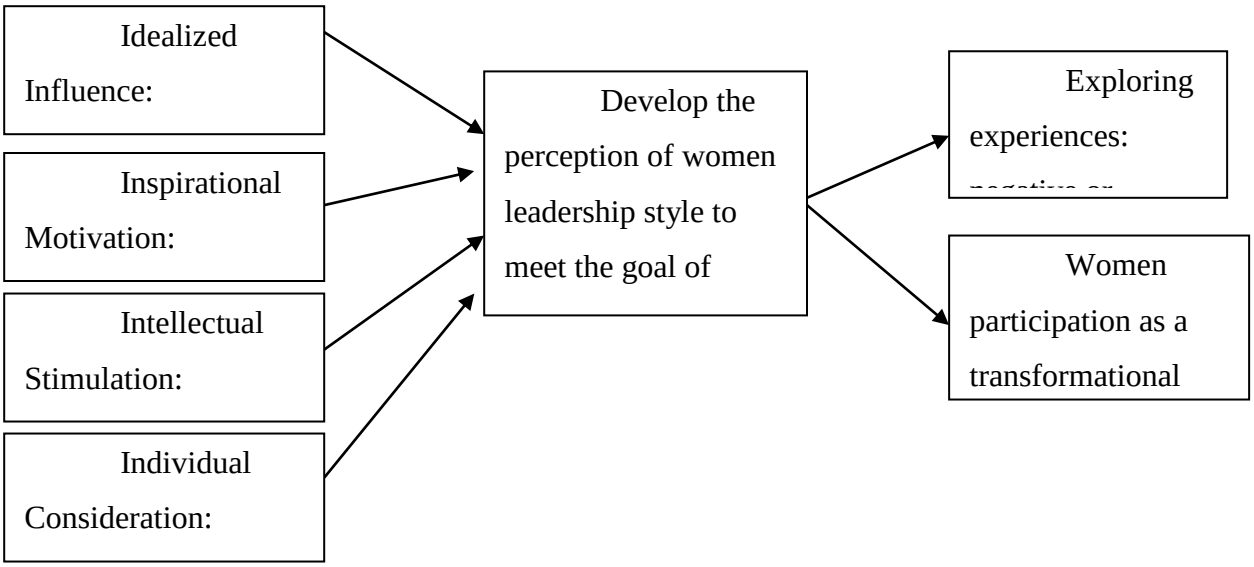
women in Nepal hesitate to ask for a sanitary pad; how can one say that the discussion of feminism is in practice for equal rights?

Moreover, I felt that I should study this; therefore, I have focused on exploring the hidden challenges women headteachers face and the availability of equal opportunities, particularly in the context of the study area. Similarly, the reviewed literature shows an underrepresentation of women head teachers in the school context, facing different challenges and still lacking in achieving equal participation in the different vital positions worldwide. Moreover, Nepal is no exception in this regard. Therefore, this study helps to put effort into women's equal participation in the head teacher position and quality of education by exploring their stories regarding their struggle to achieve the position and leadership traits in transformational perspectives.

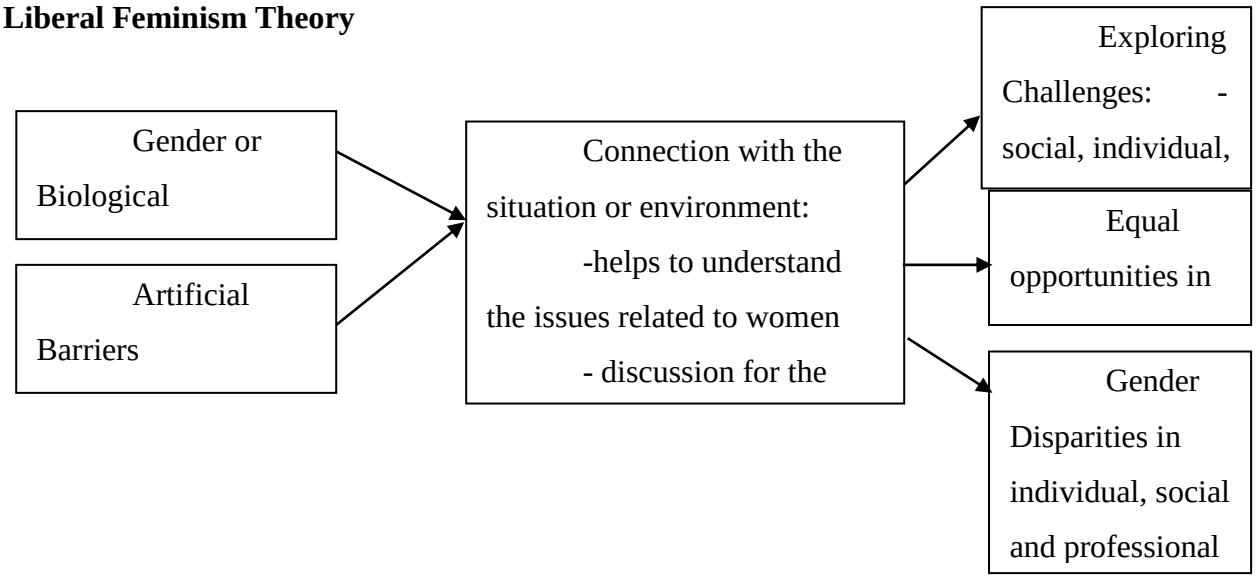
Theoretical Guideline

Transformational Leadership Theory

Component of Transformational Leadership



Liberal Feminism Theory



In this research, I have used the lenses of transformational leadership theory and liberal feminism theories to comprehend the issues related to women. The four pillars of the transformational leadership theory are used to understand how women head teachers can assume leadership roles. Similarly, liberal theory promotes the idea that societal perspectives on gender pose obstacles for women seeking to lead effectively. Giving

women the same value and opportunities as males is another presumption that impacts their ability to participate equally in leadership roles.

This study is connected with the quality of transformational leadership theory to view the leadership style of women leaders. In contrast, liberal feminism theory looks at challenges and equal values or opportunities. Therefore, I am convinced to use these three theories for my study.

Essence of Chapter

I have discussed two aspects in this chapter: a literature review and a theoretical exposition of the theory of change. I reviewed the literature study's issues and regulations pertaining to women and their leadership styles. I persuasively expressed my interpretation that linked to the goal of my research during the literature review. Furthermore, I have highlighted the gaps in the research on policy and practice related to the obstacles women experience in achieving leadership roles. Similarly, in the next section of this chapter, I have covered the liberal feminist theory and transformational leadership theory to comprehend the difficulties experienced by women and the leadership style of women head teachers. The theoretical framework used in this study is also outlined in this chapter.

CHAPTER-III
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes the entire methodological procedures to explore the stories of women headteachers related to the challenges and opportunities with a transformational perspective of the leadership role of the selected school of Lalitpur Metropolitan City. This chapter includes the philosophical foundation, where I have discussed the study's ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Further, I have demonstrated the research paradigm and design and discussed information collection, interpretation, and meaning-making. Finally, I have described the research area and participants, the information collection procedure, the study's credibility, and ethical considerations.

Philosophical Consideration

Ontology deals with the nature of social reality. Killam (2013) writes that ontology is the beliefs of researchers regarding the fundamental nature and existence of reality, which can be single or multiple. Exploring stories of women headteachers denotes the multiple experiences regarding challenges and opportunities as a women head teacher. Selected participants are from different family backgrounds, school environments, and age groups, and they perceive their roles differently. Therefore, in this study, my participants have different (positive or negative) experiences and interpreted the reality of leadership roles accordingly, being a head teacher. As the way of thinking and perceiving differs for every individual, I have explored multiple types of experiences in this study.

Killam (2013) defines epistemology as acquiring knowledge or information and examining the relationship between researcher and information during research. I obtained information from selected participants (women head teachers) in this study through a self-made open-ended questionnaire. I have collected the participant's experiences through active interaction, face-to-face interviews, and discussion. While interacting with them, I gained knowledge through observation, facial expression, tone of voice, gestures, and body language to make their honest responses. Therefore, I am sure that the information collected is authoritative and truthful.

Axiology is the ethical value of obtaining information. According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), axiology refers to the values guided by the researcher, a way to manage moral issues and respect the rights of participants. I have long working experience as a female teacher and department head, where I could have experienced happy and sorrowful moments. Therefore, my own experiences, norms, and values are also reflected in this study.

Research Paradigm and Design

This research is based on an interpretive paradigm. I have selected interpretivism as my research paradigm in light of my relativist ontology and social constructivist epistemological foundation. I reasoned that since my purpose and research topic are to investigate stories of women, incorporating interpretivism into my study makes it logical. As the interpretive paradigm consists of multiple realities and interpretations even in one circumstance (Taylor & Medina, 2011), it made sense to me to perceive various experiences of women head teachers regarding the individual, social, and professional context and their leadership style. I believe in subjectivity and contextual knowledge. Most people create different interpretations of the same thing because there are various realities and perspectives, and knowledge is obtained from a range of situations and content.

In order to enhance the understanding of perceptions and practices, it is imperative to gather research participants' opinions and perspectives (Cohen et al., 2017). I can better comprehend my participants' ideas and points of view through informal discussions, and I can subsequently apply this understanding to interpret their ideas in social, professional, and individual contexts. As an interpretive researcher, I thus set out to comprehend how they interpreted what was around them. Using an interpretative paradigm, I can make connections between the various narratives of participants about their struggles to become head teachers and carry out their duties. Because action is the main emphasis of interpretive study (Cohen et al., 2018), acts only have significance when we can truly understand another person's sorrow and joy by placing ourselves in their shoes. As I am also a part of this research, my point of view is included in the interpretation process. Because the new concept of interpretive paradigm highlights the

importance of the researcher's point of view in the interpretation process (Taylor & Medina, 2011), I have maintained credibility.

Research design is the entire framework that connects the study issues. Narrative inquiry is one of the research designs of qualitative research to perceive the feelings, information, experiences, and stories of participants. In this study, I have used the narrative inquiry to explore the stories related to the challenges of women head teachers from a transformational perspective. Narrative inquiry is an approach to investigating, gathering, and evaluating stories (Connelly & Cladinin, 2004). Similarly, according to Clandinin (2006), narrative inquiry is a logical approach to understanding the information collected from the participants, represented as narrations or stories. In this study, participants are women head teachers, and to understand their experience logically, the narrative inquiry helped me as the best approach. Participant's stories encompass not only their own experiences but also other societal facets ranging from the micro to the macro level of society (Clandinin et al. 2016). Therefore, I investigated, told, and reflected on my participants' experiences. Due to this design, I could better understand the participants' perspectives on their leadership journey and how they overcame adversity to develop and become leaders.

Creswell (2009) also stated that narrative inquiry is an approach to studying the lives of individuals and stories, which the researcher can revive in a narrative report. Similarly, Bell (2017) mentioned in his journal that narrative inquiry is the best process for understanding and gathering information about participants' lived experiences. Therefore, narrative inquiry makes sense for me to perceive, interpret, and report the stories of women head teachers. As Maxwell (2012) stated, story research is primarily a way of observing, understanding, and interacting with people's experiences in their environments.

Research Sites and Participants

My study aims to explore stories of only women head teachers, where the number of women headteachers is nominal. According to Dahal (2014), a qualitative investigation usually concentrates on a limited number of participants or even a carefully chosen example that might adequately address the research questions. I have purposively

selected only four women head teachers from secondary-level public schools in light of the researcher's interests, purpose, and study context (Palys, 2008).

To meet the research goal, I selected four head teachers from public schools in Lalitpur district purposively, which is the most literate district of Nepal. However, data shows that fewer women are in the head teacher position even in Lalitpur. Therefore, I was curious to study the stories related to the challenges women headteachers face from the transformational perspective of the Lalitpur district. Hence, I searched for the school head teachers who could provide me with a thorough response to my research question and assistance in understanding the subject matter I was studying so that I could choose the participants. Similarly, the goal of this study could be achieved by women head teachers who are newly appointed, have more than a decade of experience leading public schools, and struggle to get appointed head teachers. In light of my study criteria, I finally selected four women head teachers from four public schools in the Lalitpur district.

Similarly, I had chosen participants based on their working experience, educational qualifications, and ethnicity. The researcher believes that Lalitpur district consists of town and rural areas, so the representation of town area and rural area is included as the unit of my study. Similarly, my participants are from different social construction, working environments, and experiences because I believe participants from different social constructs, working experiences, and educational backgrounds have different stories or experiences, which could help to explore the multiple realities related to the challenges of women head teachers.

I have selected a public school, “A,” in Lalitpur district, which has been running for over three decades and is located outside of Ring Road in a dense area of Lalitpur. The school has a building with good physical infrastructure, over a thousand students, and 39 teaching and administrative staff. This school has been providing quality education for a long time. As a result, primary schooling has been expanded to secondary education (up to 12 classes).

The second study area, also called school "B," is situated in the middle of Lalitpur and has been in operation for over half a century. The school has its building with all the basic facilities. It uses each corner attractively and nicely decorated with

informative quotes. It has been giving quality education with necessary practical education. The school has about 600 students and 34 academic and non-academic staff.

The third research area school, “C,” has been serving for two decades. The school is located outside of town in a serene, picturesque setting. However, few people live in the area, and there are few reliable public transportation options. It makes it difficult for employees and students outside the school to get to class. Still, the school has 220 students.

The fourth school, “D,” is from the center of Lalitpur. The school was established and has been running for more than two decades. It has a well-equipped, attractive building. This school also provides quality education, with more than five hundred students getting an education.

My Research Participants

Ansika is fifty-eight years old, is married, has two kids, and lives in a joint family. She holds a master's degree in education and has been employed in this field for forty years. She began her career as a primary school teacher and has been in the head teacher position of the school "A" for the past 12 years. During her education, she was the only female student at her school. Her stories have described her early struggles as a young girl trying to gain an education. However, she got to where she is now with the full backing of her family and her own dedication and determination. Similarly, she balances her career and family and has a positive attitude and a cooperative nature.

Rachayeeta is forty-one years old, is married, has one child, and lives in a nuclear family. She has completed her M.Phil. She is dynamic, talented, strong, and commanding by nature. She has been interested in this profession since childhood and began her career as a secondary-level teacher (temporary). Then, in 2071, she passed the TSC exam for the secondary level teacher. She has been working in teaching for twenty years and has been leading the school as a head teacher for nine years effectively. She appreciated her family, society, and the organization for their support and for giving her the chance to be in this role. In the meantime, she believed that her abilities, knowledge, and willingness to create new ideas for quality education made her a better head teacher.

Shrawantika is forty-two years old, married, has two children, and lives in a nuclear family. She has completed her M.Phil and has more than fifteen years of

experience in teaching. She joined this profession as a primary level teacher through the TSC exam, and again, she passed the TSC exam for secondary level teacher in 2071 and has been serving as head teacher for six years. Her family did not fully back her. Her family is well-educated, and they encourage her to pursue education in simple subjects since they want her to spend more time with her family and children. She felt that because she was stubborn and self-confident by nature, she compelled her family to pursue an education in the field of her choice. She believed that family support was crucial. If your family supports you, you can achieve your goal and balance your personal and professional life. She is an effective motivator in her profession, encouraging those around her to face challenges, as she has overcome many.

Binika is 56 years old, married, and has two children. Her educational qualification is a Master's in Education, and she has served in this profession for 40 years. After attending her S.L.C. examination, she was offered to teach at the pre-primary level. Then, she passed the TSC exam for primary level teacher and was appointed permanent teacher in the same school. Her narratives showed that achieving the head teacher position results from her dedication, passion, hard work, and organizational support as her grandmother led the school. She initially had no support from her family after getting married. She had a great deal of difficulty continuing her work. There was orthodox in the family that women should not work outside the home. She believed that where there is a will, there is a way to keep balancing family and work, and she is gradually able to gain the trust and support of her family. She has been experienced and has contributed long in the teaching profession but has less experience in the head teacher position. Now, she has been leading her school successfully and believes in enhancing her followers and working together to achieve the common goal of the school.

Information Collection Process, Tools, and Techniques

As this study is designed as qualitative research, I have gathered the information by organizing open-ended questions. Furthermore, cross or supportive questions were asked to explore the reality. In-depth interviews (multiple) were conducted to collect information from each selected participant. I also had discussions, interactions, and observations to collect the information to fulfill my study purpose. While collecting the information, I made field notes, using a reflective diary and audio recordings, based on

participants' responses, observation of their gestures with a checklist, facial expressions, and voice tone to maintain the authentication of information. I also collected the information through secondary sources, such as different kinds of literature, articles, journals, and other internet sources, for the theoretical part of the research.

After receiving approval from Kathmandu University School of Education's research committee, I gathered information. I purposefully gathered information from four chosen schools where the head teachers were women. I made an appointment with the purposively selected women's head teacher, and verbal informed consent was taken. After that, I scheduled the interview with the selected participants with their approval. As scheduled, I interviewed her cabin, where they had already informed her staff not to disturb her until an emergency, which helped maintain their privacy and avoid unwanted disturbances. Interviews were conducted with the ease of participants' time and without hampering their personal and professional responsibilities.

Further interviews were taken based on the achievement of my study objectives. After the narrative interview, the information was reviewed for pertinent information, key terms, important body language, and emotional expression. Before moving on to the following participants, I reviewed the accuracy and completeness of the first participant. After completing the information collection process, I checked and arranged the collected information properly for interpretation.

Interpretation and Meaning Making

I used an interpretive approach to explore the experiences of women head teachers. I met with my participants two to three times and made phone calls to collect truthful and rich information. That supported me in interpretation and meaning-making. It enabled me to construct an insightful understanding of the different experiences of my participants. I interpreted based on the interactions, word choice, tone of voice, and facial expression.

According to Cohen et al. (2018), the interpretive paradigm emphasizes an activity that becomes significant only when we ascertain the participants' intent to communicate their experiences. As an interpretive researcher, I thus set out to comprehend how they interpreted their surroundings. I can connect the various narratives of participants regarding their coping mechanisms for securing leadership roles because

of the interpretive paradigm. As a result, I used the experiences and behaviors of the participants, which they shared during the interview I conducted. It indicates that the journey of the women head teachers is the main focus of this study, and the experiences of these head teachers are used to generate meaning. I explored the experiences of women headteachers from transformational leadership viewpoints using an interpretive methodology. Thus, the narratives of each person were subjective. Taylor and Medina (2013) stated that in the interpretive paradigm, the researcher's experiences are essential in the interpretation and inquiry process. Thus, I was conscious and transparent about my experiences and values in interpreting other individuals' knowledge and feelings.

My thorough review of every audio recording and the following transcription that ensured correctness were crucial steps in the meaning-making process for my study. I employed an inductive approach to find narrative themes and search patterns in the information connected to my research objectives to create meaning effectively. After that, I transcribed the information I had gathered through a qualitative information evaluation approach. The procedure was reflexive, involving ongoing interpretation of the information.

I presented stories to readers comprehensibly and insightfully while preserving the spirit of the participants' shared narratives. I thus paid close attention to every detail of their stories as they were told. I first listened to the audio recordings several times, containing participant stories. I subsequently documented every story that women head teachers told. I read and re-read them for an insightful understanding of women head teachers' different types of experiences. I therefore coded and classified based on similar experiences. Then after, I generated the collected information into different themes for meaning-making, which was interpreted based on multiple realities and experiences of the participants.

Furthermore, I consulted theory and other pertinent literature to understand the meaning of the themes. It enhanced my comprehension of the significance of the participants' stories and allowed me to place their experiences within a larger framework. After finishing this review, I could evaluate the participants' experiences and how their stories related to my research questions. In general, a deep and rich conversation that

interacted with the complexity of the participants' experiences could only be developed through evaluating and understanding the stories.

Quality Standard of the Study

The discipline of educational studies is reliant on upholding quality standards. As a qualitative researcher, I made every effort to follow the narrative inquiry's conformability, transferability, truthfulness, credibility, and trustworthiness standards. Qualitative research is concerned with the trustworthiness of confirming whether the research findings represent significant information taken from participant's correct interpretation of the participants' original view (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). I encouraged participants to share their experiences connecting with our society's trends, norms, and values.

Similarly, I collected the information in multiple ways: observation, discussion, interaction, and interview. Two theories, transformational leadership theory and liberal feminist theory, were used to interpret the text to make sure that research findings are well developed or to justify findings. As incorrect or misinterpreted information may ruin the researcher's hard work, I was conscious while interacting with participants to collect reliable information. I observed the participants' facial expressions, tone of voice to analyze critically, memo writing of the words used by participants, and audio recording to interpret the information with originality. Maintaining confidentiality and privacy are other essential keys to maintaining the quality standard, for which I provided the pseudonym. Moreover, I have transcribed, coded, created the theme, and interpreted the text based on the pseudo name.

I had closely understood the participant's story or personal experiences. I used three dimensions of narrative inquiry, which included temporality, sociality, and spatiality, to maintain the quality of my research. These three factors provided the narrative structure for my analysis.

Temporality

Traditionally, temporality is defined as a linear progression of time in the past, present, and future (Karimi, 2010). Every individual encounters many situations during their lifetime, dealing with them or performing various behaviors (Cunliffe et al., 2004). Even while time is a vital aspect of everything we do and are essentially aware of, there is

something about time that the human mind cannot fully understand. However, past experiences are always connected with the present and future. As Landing et al. (2007) have stated, the study's events are in a state of temporal transition, meaning they always have a past, present, and future. Thus, to explore the information related to women's challenges in the journey of head teacher and transformation after being a head teacher, I was able to discuss how their prior experiences may be impacted by events that exist today and in the future. I gathered empirical knowledge about whether participants have experienced such challenges. Similarly, in the present day, their experiences to overcome the challenges and transformation after being a head teacher and future planning as a women head teacher to empower women.

Sociality

In qualitative research, social connections or interactions with participants help to understand their thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Clandinin et al. (2007) mention that by focusing on social conditions, the narrative inquirer brings attention to the existential circumstances, environment, and external human and socio-cultural forces that define each person's context. Therefore, while interacting with participants, I was concerned about their personal and social-cultural ethics. At the same time, I built good relationships with participants to generate the information smoothly.

Spatiality

I selected the place based on the choice of participants to conduct the interview so they felt comfortable telling their stories. Because Clandinin (2006) also stated that the narrative inquirer must be open to creating the field texts in collaboration with the participant, focusing on positioning while generating information in the field is essential. I chose the participant's workplace, which was at the participant's convenience, to observe and get supportive information for this study.

Ethical Consideration

I have respected human rights, dignity, privacy, autonomy, professional competence, and expertise through education and learning experiences in this study. Specifically, ethical guidelines in qualitative research provide a significant contribution because of the in-depth nature of the research process (Arifin, 2018). I also followed the guidelines to protect the rights of participants and reduce their stress and risk of the study.

Therefore, after getting approval for my research proposal from the Research Committee of Kathmandu University School of Education (KUSOED), I visited the research area that was purposely selected from four secondary schools of Lalitpur Metropolitan City with a formal letter of KUSOED. During the preliminary visit, I introduced myself to the school management committee and purposely selected participants (women head teachers of purposely selected four secondary schools) politely with the purpose and rationale of my study. I informed participants about their right to speech freedom, voluntary contribution to this study, and freedom to withdraw between research processes if they suffer for personal or professional reasons. Fleming (2018) has also stated that participants must be informed fully regarding their information. I informed my participants about what they would be asked, how their information would be used, and what results could be of their information.

Fleming (2018) has highlighted that maintaining confidentiality is a crucial step to protect participants from potential harm (either physical or mental). Therefore, I ensured that my participants' and schools' confidentiality and privacy were maintained. Regarding confidentiality, I have strictly followed the guidelines set forth by KUSOED while conducting the research. I have not revealed or made public any information that protects the participants' privacy. I allowed them to skip answering any questions they felt might not be pertinent to the research or would upset or uneasy them. I have not disregarded any laws, traditions, or local conventions.

I used the pseudonym to collect information, interpret and report the findings to keep their identity confidential and reduce harm to their positions and reputation. Similarly, I met the participants individually to maintain privacy while taking the interview, discussion, or interaction with them.

As this research is related to women, I was aware of the participants not to affect their timing. As stated in the literature, there are obstacles from the family; therefore, I allowed adequate time for the selected participants to discuss with their family/husbands whether to participate. As a female researcher, I was aware of women's feelings; therefore, while sharing their experiences, when they felt stressed or uncomfortable, I tried to make them feel at ease with informal discussions. While taking information, I listened to the participant carefully. I kept a record of every sentence they used, using

memo writing, field notes, and audio recordings (with participants' permission) with observations to guide this study with the original view of participants. I have not used the information without proof, have respected the copyrights, and acknowledge the secondary type of information that contributed to this study.

Essence of Chapter

In this chapter, I have discussed the approach used in this study. It began with a discussion of ontology, epistemology, and axiology in the philosophical foundation. Similarly, I explained and provided evidence for my research technique using narrative inquiry and the interpretative paradigm. The research site, participant selection, information collection, and meaning-making process have all been thoroughly explained. Further, I have explained how I have maintained the ethical aspects of the study.

CHAPTER-IV

EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN HEADTEACHERS REFLECTING INDIVIDUAL, SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONTEXTS

Every individual is different in their manner. Thus, their experiences and understanding will vary. Many different social, personal, professional, and educational backgrounds are represented in the experiences and understanding. Their daily lives and perspectives on the phenomenon significantly impact how they perceive the situation.

In this chapter, I have presented and thematically interpreted narratives I collected from interviewees. I have presented responses from women head teachers at public schools in the Lalitpur district to the research question: How do head teachers experience professional, social, and individual contexts to achieve the head teacher position in schools? I have collected participants' narratives through face-to-face interviews, phone calls, field notes, and reflective diaries.

The narratives I acquired from my research participants were a big help in understanding the answer to my first research question, which is about women's experiences primarily in their individual, social, and professional contexts. As per the narration of my participants, I have categorized the collected information into five different themes based on their exciting and informative accounts of the experiences of women head teachers, which are (1) self-confidence and determination, (2) maternal essence: a canvas of potentiality or stumbling block (3) socio-cultural support for women’s leadership (4) familial bond: help or hindrance on the path to school head teacher (5) underrepresentation; barriers for women participation in leadership. Based on field text and audio recordings, I presented the conversation using the participants' perspectives. The information collected from the observation and the content of the participant interviews is presented in italics.

Self-Confidence and Determination

Self-confidence is about knowing who you are, believing in your capacity for achievement, and working toward that accomplishment (Pradipa, 2023). Self-confidence keeps you combating your objectives with conviction and determination, even in a

challenging situation. All four participants I met during my research respected the head teacher's position. However, they all displayed humility and accepted the difficulties while pursuing their leadership goals. Most people give up on their goals because of a lack of confidence. However, the participants of this study have been devoted to their positions and committed to their responsibilities no matter the situation. Due to this, they are in the position of head teacher in the present day. Similarly, determination is a quality that you will need to achieve different goals and objectives in your personal and professional life. It enables you to persevere and continue your efforts to reach significant milestones.

For this study, I interacted with the first participant, Ansika, about her journey to attain the leadership (head teacher) position. Being a head teacher was difficult for the first participant, and she suffered many challenges. She shared various experiences of her struggle as a girl to complete her school education, which was tough for her.

Every person has their own set of life objectives. Every person works hard and lives their life for a purpose. It was difficult for Ansika to put her interests ahead of social boundaries.

> *While studying till the lower secondary level, I was the only female student in the class, so boys teased me. There used to be a leisure period, so I was confused about whether to continue my studies. Therefore, I joined Kanya Niketan of Patan, which is far from my house. There was not easy transportation, and only girls were there. Still, I was confused about whether to continue my study. Some people in our society questioned my father's decision to send me to school.*

After listening to her story, it hit me to think how difficult it was for her to complete her schooling. Then, it was tough for girls to go to school and study and complete school-level education in the patriarchal society. She even faced harsh comments about her father and herself. However, she was determined to complete her education and continue her studies. Her story shows that making a foundation for a leadership position is also challenging for a girl. She was the only girl in her class, which shows that girls' education status was inferior during her time (about 50 years ago). However, her confidence and determination led her to complete her secondary education. If she had not had the confidence to deal with the challenges she faced, she

would never have been in her current position. That shows that without the requisite confidence, great things are rarely accomplished. Ansika further stated that she never expected to be the head teacher till she passed SLC.

> *Passing the SLC examination is the foundation for my success. When I passed S.L.C., I felt there was nothing I could not do. I was involved in communism with some famous leaders and active in social work and women's empowerment. We used to perform dancing and singing for women's empowerment and awareness. A few girls were involved in dancing and singing, and we had to perform and coordinate with boys, which was not taken positively during that time. So, people in our society started complaining to my family. However, when I passed S.L.C., society started believing in me. They started saying, "Nachera hide pani padhai ma safal vayo".*

Her narration revealed that people trust and believe you if you succeed in achieving your goal. When you are determined to do something, you can be successful. The narrative shows how society believed her when she passed SLC. The trust and belief helped her to be more confident to step toward the position of head teacher, as it has been extensively researched and scientifically demonstrated that self-confidence and leadership are correlated (Perets et al., 2023). When she passed S.L.C., she was offered a teaching job in a local school, where she worked hard and continued her studies. Due to her hard work and dedication to her profession, she was selected as the head teacher of the secondary level even though she was in the primary quota. She narrated her experience in the words below:

> *When I was selected as a head teacher, I was working in a primary quota. There were no teachers in the secondary level quota who could fill the position of head teacher. Due to my professionalism in teaching, I was selected as a head teacher, though I was working in the primary quota, and to my dismay, I am still in the same primary quota. I remember those teaching at the lower secondary level were not taking their duties seriously. They were not up to the mark. They used to come late to school and leave the school earlier for their personal work without the head teacher's permission. Their priority was their work first and then professional responsibilities.*

Surprisingly, the ones who did not fulfill their professional responsibilities were male. I remember when I talked with them, from their attitude, I could figure out that "purush bhayera ta kaam nagarne ni". However, I was honest about my duties and responsibilities. I never used to be late at school even though I had an infant to look after. I was very supportive of each ECA program conducted in school. I never missed any meetings at the school. Sometimes, we had school management meetings till 8 pm, and the following day, we had to attend the teacher's workshop at 7 am. It was tough as I had to do all my household chores and care for my 6-month baby. With all those routines, I was diligently doing my job. Maybe because the school management committee and the community noticed my effort to give to my school, one day, all of them, along with a few of my colleagues, who believed I could be the best suited for the position, requested me to take this significant and challenging position of head teacher. I still remember some secondary-level teachers were against me; they were against my position as a head teacher. Further, when they could not withstand it, they even filed a petition against me. After a few months of the legal fight, the court's decision in my favor made me believe that "If you are right, no one can ever shake you out."

After delving into her story, I learned that work has to be prioritized when somebody is working. I could see that Ansika had prioritized her work first, and because of this, she could win many hearts. Though she was not in the secondary level quota, she was liked by most people and was able to get the position of head teacher despite being in the primary quota only. She chose the institutional aim due to her tenacity and willpower and consistently committed herself to enhancing the system and school. She was effective in gaining the respect of her co-workers and fellow employees. She even enjoyed popularity in a few groups, which sketched the path to success as the head teacher.

Ansika impressed me with her belief that disparity in selection at a higher position does not always occur because of gender. In her case also, she could achieve a higher position because she was giving her hundred percent in her work. She did not say it was late or early to fulfill her duty. It made me believe that nothing is challenging to achieve if you are true to your work and have potential. As it is rightly said, "Where there is a

will, there is a way," Ansika added that *only those who can use obstacles as motivational tools can win over others' hearts.* She harmonizes that obstacles teach people the actual value of hard work.

To clarify this study, I interacted with the next participant, Rachayeeta. The narratives of Rachayeeta explore that we are in a culture where male family members make decisions related to female members. Due to this, women lack decision-making skills and self-confidence in doing anything. I have included her words below:

> *Before marriage, we must ask our father; after marriage with our husband, and if there is no husband, then with son to make any decision. Women are not in decision-making, and there is always a higher authority. Not only that, but since childhood, we have never had an opportunity for decision-making, nor have we ever encouraged leadership. There is a lack of self-confidence in taking leadership. Therefore, women are unable to take leadership positions.*

Her statement clarifies that a lack of self-confidence and decision-making is a challenge for women in achieving leadership positions in Nepal. In a leadership position, the confidence to interact with challenging situations or to make decisions for the betterment of the institution is most important. The culture of our country of raising the male and female members of the family is biased. Corner (1997) presented in his paper that most traditional societies keep girls mostly inside the boundaries of the home and family, where they are safeguarded and trained to accept the decisions made on their behalf by parents, teachers, and brothers. Girls frequently lack the self-confidence and abilities necessary to perform well in formal leadership positions due to their lack of experience in a public setting. The trend discussed by Corner was about 26 years ago, but unfortunately, many obstacles still need to be removed to improve women's participation in decision-making. Patriarchy or male supremacy is frequently mentioned as the primary cause of women's low levels of participation in leadership (Asuako, 2020). The discussion with Rachayeeta also indicates that women have less self-confidence to lead the institution or take leadership positions in case positions are offered too. That indicates that while confidence and determination are necessary for achieving a higher position, our society's trend negatively affects women's self-confidence and willingness to aspire

for leadership. Another participant, Shrawantika, shared her views and experience regarding self Confidence and determination in the words below:

> *To be in this position, I feel math subject helped me. Studying math is difficult for ladies. My baby was small, but I could not stop studying math. I was fully determined to study math, so I didn't leave to continue studying. In the teacher service commission, there is probably low competition in math compared to other easy subjects.*

The above story of Shrawantika points out that dedication and determination to achieve the goal are the keys to success. Her determination to study math was the base for achieving a leadership position, even though it was challenging to manage her time as her baby was so small. Archard (2012) opines that girl occasionally lacked confidence in their leadership capacity and underrated their leadership potential. Women should have struggled harder to achieve higher positions since they lacked the self-assurance and determination to succeed. However, the women working as head teachers shared that they are in this position due to their tenacity and confidence, which was developed by the family support and confidence in the candidate.

Maternal Essence: A Canvas of Potentiality or Stumbling Block

One of the motivating factors for employees is a need for belonging, which is satisfied by the family-like environment and the relationships you have with your coworkers and your leader, both inside and outside the organization (Moorhead & Griffin, 2008). Bilal et al. (2021) found that employees who work under women's leadership form a connection and trust with their leader, encouraging employee innovation at work. As a result, the employees will develop friendships for social contact, which in turn can promote a sense of teamwork and connection. I observed that Ansika while conversing with the assistant staff, was very kind and polite. Similarly, when a parent came to meet the head teacher (a female) during my visit to the school of Shrawantika, I could sense that she had established a harmonious environment in the school. Despite waiting a long time, that parent was not in the slightest way impatient. It appeared that the parent felt at ease approaching the head teacher, even though the assistant head teacher had offered to assist that parent (female) with her queries related to her children. Regarding this, Ansika shared:

I believe leaders should be friendly in the school sector to create a learner and learning-friendly environment. I believe in friendly rather than bossy behavior to lead an institution smoothly. I treat everyone very friendly, but sometimes I feel "jasta lai testai bhane jhai" (tit for tat) kahile kahi chahi, threaten garne lai gala ma chadkan hanne, testo pani chaihine rahechha. There is a lack of command in female leadership. By nature also, women are kind, patient, and polite, which helps to create a friendly working environment, but sometimes like "mayale nyaya paudaina" our kindness doesn't work all the time. We need to be commanding. "*jati sojho vayo teti hepera kunai kunai teacher le ta naterne*" (sometimes, teachers disobey and take for granted our compassion). *While making routine this year, I had an experience where one teacher denied taking the class because there were 50 students in a class. I could not separate the section because there were only 50 students. I got so angry and said, "If you do not want to teach, give in written form." I said to everyone. The next day, no one questioned, and started working on schedule. Sometimes, I treat myself strictly (laugh); otherwise, I treat everyone in a friendly way.*

The above narration shows that women's nature is soft and polite, which may positively impact the favorable school environment. Meanwhile, she thinks that whatever nature is, as per the situation, we should go beyond nature because the fundamental factor in how people achieve and develop leadership is their leadership identity (Robin et al., 2011). One's leadership is not evaluated based on past performance or personality traits. That is why Ansika's statement shows that most parents, students, or some of the school staff like maternal essence, which creates a healthy environment. Getting support from all is an opportunity to enhance the ability, but sometimes, maternal essence is a stumbling block for the women on the way to success. Sometimes, women are dominated or threatened by other people due to their motherly nature. Not only that, but she also had experience with some of the staff members not obeying due to her nature.

Rachayeeta's story was different from the Ansika. She thinks that motherly nature is an opportunity for women to improve the quality of the school environment, not a stumbling block.

> *I found there is an opportunity for women because, by nature, we are like we feed to others, and then only we eat. In fact, after feeding all the family members, if there is not enough food, we also say it is enough. That means we have a kind of motherhood nature, which we female leaders can implement in leadership. I have experienced that the things our teachers or students cannot share with the male headteacher can be easily shared with the female headteacher. There is a soft corner in females. I mean, teachers or students can feel the feelings of motherhood or a kind of familiar environment. You may also ask my teachers that my teachers used to say to me that when there was a head, sir, they used to run away in fear of meeting him. If they brought some delicious tiffin food, they would call me to take it. That means there is no hesitation in talking or sitting with me. That is why I feel that happened, and that is because of female leadership.*

It is evident from the stories of Rachayeeta that women leaders treat the workplace like a family and nurture it even more effectively. They treat the environment and the people at their workplace with care and consider it home (Febriantina, 2016). Therefore, the followers and students can quickly become familiar with them and share every issue. The behaviors of women headteachers demonstrated that they articulate their leadership role clearly, which creates opportunities for other women, too.

Socio-Cultural Support for Women's Leadership

A significant connection exists between socio-cultural influence and career advancement that can have combined effects that are either beneficial or detrimental (Mahat & Aithal, 2022). Each participant in this study comes from a variety of socio-cultural backgrounds. Three out of four female participants achieved the head teacher position because of socio-cultural support. Most of them mention either the support of society or policy. Ansika said, "*I am here due to the female quota."* She remembered how she never expected to do a job in school. Furthermore, she shared:

> *I never thought of getting a job after passing SLC. I thought I would earn money to survive by learning the tailoring skill. However, I passed SLC by chance, which was unexpected for me. However, I did not think of teaching or having a job.* L*et us say it is through my fortune, love, and support of our society that I got an opportunity to teach as there was a female quota in school, and the school*

> *management team offered me the teaching. Later on, due to my professionalism in teaching, I was selected as a head teacher, though I was working in the primary quota, and to my dismay, I am still in the same primary quota. I remember those teaching at the lower secondary level were not taking their duties claimed for the position, which created a hurdle on my way, maybe because the school management committee and the community noticed the effort I was giving to my school.*
>
> *Similarly, society also supported me as I am the daughter and daughter-in-law of this society. Not only that but also I was active in social work and women's empowerment. So, no one could stop me from being the head teacher. Hence, one fine day, all of them, along with a few of my colleagues, who believed I could be the best suited for the position, requested me to take this big and challenging position of head teacher.*

The above narration indicates that she was selected for the teaching profession due to the policy of a 33 percent quota for women's inclusion. At the same time, the policy and her society were in her favor. Her statement clarifies that she was undoubtedly doing the best of her professional responsibilities and was a deserving candidate for the head teacher position. However, she proudly stated her societal support for being the head teacher, which made me wonder if she would not be the daughter and daughter-in-law in that society, couldn't she be chosen to be the head teacher? At the same time, I felt that the essence of her statement was that even if you are qualified, societal support is vital to achieving the leadership position. Similarly, Rachayeeta shared her experience about her interest in teaching and community support to be in the position of head teacher. She said,

> *I choose this profession intentionally. However, talking about the head teacher, I was not ready to take the position as it was too early. However, I was selected as the head teacher due to time and circumstances. There were only two options: appointing a new headteacher from outside or appointing me as a new headteacher. Talking about the history of this school, we can say that it was established by our "Jyapu Community" at the very local level, and it was initiated from a room. Moreover, in addition, let us say a kind of local flavor is there in*

> *our school, about which an outsider takes lots of time to understand; in this regard, our head teacher convinced me to take the position, and I also accepted the challenge.*

Her narrative indicates that there was community support for her to be in the position of head teacher. In some communities, the outside people are unacceptable as they have different local cultures and are afraid that others do not understand their culture. Similarly, the fourth participant, Binika, has the same story: she was offered the teaching profession when she was leisurely after S.L.C., as her grandmother established the school. She was working there as a teacher, and when her grandmother retired, her elder sister was working as the head teacher, and she was working as the assistant- head teacher. Moreover, when her elder sister retired, she got an opportunity to be the head teacher of the secondary level, but she is still in the primary quota. She shared her experience in addition:

> *My grandmother established this school and called me to serve as a teacher when I was in my leisure time after my S.L.C. in 2041. Then, in 2046, I attempted the TSC exam and got selected at the primary level, as it was not difficult to be selected then. There was less competition, but more local people were there, but I was still selected very easily. When the head teacher, my elder sister, retired, I was chosen to be the assistant head teacher and served for about eight years. In this way, I am working as the head teacher as it is assumed that spontaneously, the assistant head teacher will be selected for the head teacher.*

In the above story, Binika expressed that she got the opportunity to teach at the school as her grandmother established it. Similarly, her narrative indicates that social privilege selected her for the head teacher position. However, Mahat and Aithal (2022) lauded in their study that sociocultural factors have a negative impact. Based on the statements of Ansika, Rachayeeta, and Binika and the reviewed literature, it can be said that social privilege is crucial to the career development of women. However, a hostile socio-cultural environment makes it difficult for women to acquire leadership positions because most of the women presently in leadership positions have received socio-cultural favor directly or indirectly. However, the story of Shrawantika differs from that of being in this profession and being selected for the head teacher position. From the beginning,

she was interested in a profession where she could serve people selflessly, for which she had to select either nursing or teaching, and she chose to teach. Because she was good in math subjects and interested in teaching math, in this way, she attempted the TSC exam, where she got selected. Furthermore, her narration is given below:

> *I attempted the exam in 2052 when I was studying. I wasn't aware of the TSC exam while taking the exam, but I was passed when the result was published in 2061. I joined the primary level in 2061. Then, in 2070, TSC announced the vacancy after 17 years for the first time. On the first attempt, I passed the secondary level. I think I was selected due to less competition among the female candidates in math subject. So, I think math helped me to be in this position.*

She joined the school through the TSC exam and was interested in teaching. However, her narratives point out that due to the female quota, she could pass the TSC. That shows our country's policy helped to increase women's participation in the educational sector, which eventually increased participation in leadership positions. About the appointment of head teacher, she adds:

> *According to the Education Act, I was eligible for this position, so I proceeded through court. I found a problem: I was only the candidate at the secondary level for this position, and the rest of my friends were from the primary and lower secondary levels. However, one candidate from the lower secondary level claimed this position. I did not get this position easily, even though I was only the eligible candidate. I went through the legal process to be in this position. Our recent head teacher was trapped because the mentioned male teacher was local and politically powerful. So he (the recent head teacher) suggested that I go through the legal process as he was scared of physical violence from that male teacher. Therefore, according to his suggestion, I went through a legal process and got appointed through court.*

The narratives presented by Shrawantika highlight that qualified candidates sometimes suffer through many unnecessary challenges due to community support. If qualified candidates do not defend what they deserve, then the school may have an underqualified leader, which may negatively affect the quality of school education.

Familial Bond: Help or Hindrance on the Path to School Head Teacher

Family support and encouragement boost a woman's work success. Sandhu and Ahmad (2018) have mentioned that family support is important for obtaining education and training since it significantly contributes to women's empowerment and socioeconomic development. In the context of Nepal, a significant challenge for Nepalese women in leadership is work-life balance due to gender bias. The traditional view in Nepal is that males should support the family financially while women should take care of the household and child care.

In this regard, family support is vital to be the head teacher in a woman's life. Study participants also explored their experience regarding family scaffolding and women's leadership. Ansika explores her stories of how her family stood for her education and career. She clarified that without the support of her family, it would have been impossible to be in the position of head teacher. Her stories regarding family scaffolding for her position in her own words:

> *Without family support, handling the position would not have been possible. Our society used to question my father's decision to teach me. No one was there to support my study. However, my father and mother did not listen to anyone and sent me to my study. This is how I continued my studies with the support of my family. Nothing is possible without the support of family. After getting married, the support of my mother-in-law is very appreciable. After completing an intermediate level, I married but was still determined to study for a bachelor's degree. I continued my bachelor's level since my baby was so small. If there hadn't been the support of my husband and mother-in-law, then it would not have been possible to continue my study and job together.* "*aba dukheso kati pokhnu"*(how much of sorrow to express?)

Her story highlights that family is the scaffolding for women to achieve any height. It seems the family is driving the lives of women. She was very thankful to her parents, mother-in-law, and husband for her studies, caring for her children and household work. The above narrative clarifies that if women get all these opportunities for study or career, then she is lucky where all these are

normal or basic rights for men. Her last sentence, "*aba dukheso kati pokhnu"* (how much of sorrow to express?) was the sole awakening for me of how much she suffered to get the basic things such as education.

Similarly, we can see her story from another perspective: she is in the position of head teacher because her parents and family stood up in all her struggles. If all the parents and family were supportive, like her family, most women would get a good education and leadership positions. In this regard, she believed there should be respect for every girl in the family, as in our religion (Hindu). Further her narration:

> *In our religion, women are the forms of "Devi Durga," and there is the belief that there is nothing that Devi Durga (women) cannot do. While taking the name of the god-goddess, we first take the name of the goddess, which means that in the early era, women were respectful. However, now, people have forgotten humanity and morality. We all know that Mahabharat happened for the respect of women called Draupadi, therefore moral education is needed at our home to change the negative perception of society.*

She is about 58 years old and has many theoretical and practical experiences. She believed that if we follow the positive side of our religion, respecting women, women can have good status in society because she believed that women are lacking due to the negative perception of society or lack of morality.

In this regard, Rachayeeta feels lucky to have been supported by family. She never suffered through any barriers from family. She was always accessible to enhance her career in her parental and in-law's home. She is only 41 years old and thinks there is equal treatment for both men and women to have an education in her generation. She has an educated family where all the female members work equally. Therefore, she has a different story than other study participants. Still, she thinks that family is the scaffolding for all females. She said:

> *It was tough to manage my familial role and personal growth if no one could support me at home. Not only physically, but also we (women) feel pressure mentally. However, luckily, at my home, all the women are working as I am living in a joint family. When talking about my maternal home, most of the members are government employees, so they know about the work pressure. Moreover, from*

> *that perspective, I am lucky enough that they understand me. Moreover, my husband does not have a kind of 10-4 dedicated work; he works on a deadline base, which means he has flexible working hours. So I do not have all the responsibilities, so I am lucky about all these matters. However, if there were no support for the family, I would have difficulties.* She adds her observation*: In our school, I have observed that there are very few male teachers who take leave for the sickness of their kids, but talking about female teachers, they will take a leave for 1 or 2 days.*

Based on the conversation with Rachayeeta, it was found that she had full family support, which was the most strengthening part of her to be in the position of head teacher at a very young age. Also, her observation clarified that family support is crucial for women working outside the home.

Meanwhile, another fact is that if allowed to work, she must prioritize her difficulties above those of a professional, where males should not suffer more. In this aspect, if her family is supportive, she can focus more on her work advancement. However, Shrawantika struggled with her own family to achieve the leadership position. She shared:

> *While studying for a bachelor, I had already given birth to my daughter, which is why my brother or my in-laws tried to convince me not to study math; they said, "Studying math is difficult for ladies, as the baby is so small."*

Even if a woman excels in a specific subject, it can be challenging to continue her studies. The narration shows that women are born with the duty of raising young children. A query that arose in my mind after hearing her story was whether the family would also try to convince the male member to stop studying the subject he was interested in. In contrast, I felt that our family still had a biased perception regarding the right to education. Furthermore, she said:

> *After taking the leadership position, families fear she will be less involved in family responsibilities. They feel okay until working as a teacher when it comes to leadership. It is a problem for them since we ought to take care of our children. My family also raised the question about my leadership*.

The above discussion points out that it is more challenging for women to be in leadership positions. She feels that the family is the backbone of her success. Her narration:

> *Family support is much crucial. In my experience, we can fight with other people, but it is very difficult to fight on our own. When your family supports you for your first step, you can step for ten more. Likewise, if you are compelled to go back one step from your family, you will be back fifty steps from society.*

The above statement clarifies the importance of family. Similarly, you may have obstacles from external factors if there is no family support. In this regard, Binika shared her story, which differed from the other participants' experiences. I could still sense her emotions when discussing family support during her professional journey. She smiled and shared:

> *It was tough to start. I got married only after being appointed as a permanent teacher. After marriage, I did not come to school for a month. I was on leave because there was no system of working by women in my family. My family was against working women as they belonged to a wealthy family. I tactfully handled the situation as the head ma'am was my grandmother, and I convinced her to call my father-in-law to let me continue my job. When the head ma'am herself called my father-in-law, he was convinced because she had a persuasive capacity. In this way, I continued my job. However, I still had a tough time managing my personal and professional life.*

A qualified teacher who passed the TSC exam also struggled with her own family to continue her job after marriage. That means, in the context of Nepali society, male family members decide women's careers. There was the perception that women should not work by going outside. According to Binika's story, there was a disparity between wealthy families and those in which work was classified by gender. It was a big deal for her to convince her father-in-law to continue her job. She faced the challenges even after continuing her job. She said:

> *I used to finish all the household chores before coming to school. When I returned home after school, do all the house chores. I could see that they did not even do the dishes. All are in the sink; they do not wash their used cups. Women have to*

> *do all. They leave for a woman, a lady, to do so; especially, the daughter-in-law has to do everything. At 4:30 pm, when I reached home, I saw all the plates (khande thaal) on the table. They do not even pick up those dishes and keep them in the sink or wash basin, just on the table. I felt and wished I could cry out. Initially, I always cried and went to the office. Many times, I also thought of resigning. My lousy situation got worse after I had a baby.*

I still can feel her pain. She was about to tear up while sharing all these things. However, she ended her painful story by saying:

> *I am proud of myself, and my husband's support was commendable, due to which I could handle all these. Since being selected as the head teacher, he has felt proud of me and supported me in the household work. That he never did in the earlier days.*

Finally, she overcame all these challenges and struggles. Initially, she did not get support from her family except her husband. Her husband's support did not let her give up. In the beginning days, he also did not support her household work, but when she was chosen as head teacher, he supported her in her household work, encouraging her to do more. Her experience demonstrates how family support can help you to achieve success in any field, including leadership positions, while a lack of support from family can make it difficult for you to accomplish your goals.

Underrepresentation; Barriers to Women's Participation in Leadership

Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles in the workplace despite years of ongoing attempts to advance gender equality in the workplace. In addition to limiting an organization's ability to succeed, a lack of diversity feeds gender stereotypes. Despite women's increased employment in teaching over the past two decades, they are still disproportionately underrepresented in school leadership positions (UNICEF, 2022). Therefore, a deeper understanding of individual, social, and professional obstacles that prevent women from advancing to positions of leadership in schools is also required. Understanding policies and effective practices will raise the proportion of female school leaders in various contexts. After discussing with my study participants, I found that women encounter barriers that impede their career

advancement, leading to underrepresentation. As per the information collected for this study, different sub-themes are discussed below for underrepresentation.

Educational Opportunities and Policy

Educational opportunities enhance the educational experience and equip people for success in their lives and careers. It is generally agreed upon that women should have equal access to educational opportunities because education significantly impacts a person's possibilities in life, especially when it comes to becoming a leader. To understand women's participation in leadership and their challenges, I discussed this with four participants and found that a lack of educational opportunity is one of the barriers to women's presentation in leadership. In this regard, Ansika shared her experiences at 58 years old:

> *The lack of opportunities for higher study for girls is one of the reasons for underrepresentation. When I passed my S.L.C., I was the only female candidate who attempted the S.L.C. exam in our locality. Not only that but also, when I was studying in class six, I was the only girl in the whole class. Due to this, I changed schools and went to the girl's school, which was so far from my home. However, we were still confused about whether to continue my studies because some of our society questioned my father's decision to teach me. That means, in our time (39 years before), girls were not getting opportunities for study, which affected the present context, but now the times have changed, and girls are getting equal opportunities for their study.*

Based on the above discussion with Ansika, she had a challenging journey in completing her studies and achieving leadership. She pointed out that the reason for underrepresentation was a lack of educational opportunities in the early days. Many women lacked the knowledge and expertise necessary to pursue leadership roles. Lack of education reflects a lack of leadership involvement. Therefore, in the present context, women are underrepresented in school leadership. However, Rachayeeta, who is just 41 years had a different perspective regarding equal opportunity for women. She shared:

> *When talking about our generation, there is no disparity in education. However, yes, a kind of thought of women that if she does not cook food, then her*

child will remain hungry. This mentality pushes women back from a leadership position.

She got equal educational opportunities as she belonged to the young generation. Her experience highlights that, with time, women are getting equal opportunities, which may change the status of women and increase their participation in leadership. However, many women still believe their only responsibilities are to take care of their children and do home chores, which may create obstacles in their leadership journey. Furthermore, she shared:

In the portfolio, I was the only qualified candidate, but the remaining primary and secondary level teachers were senior to me in age or experience. They never said in front of me, but I could sense that they were not ready to accept me as a leader because I was very young, and they felt like just the junior would rule over us. When our recent head teacher retired, I passed my TSC secondary-level exam. So there were only two options: appointing a new headteacher from outside or appointing me as a new headteacher. Therefore, the school management committee and recent head teacher offered me the head teacher position. In this way, I got the opportunity to fill this position.

Education built the boundless opportunities for everyone. She encountered the challenges of backbiting her colleagues as she was much younger than other teachers after being chosen for the post of head teacher. That shows that if you have the education, you may overcome all the obstacles to your success.

Social Values: To Accept Women in Leadership and Gender Disparity

Patriarchal norms and values follow Nepali society. Women are stereotyped as caretakers and followers and are expected to perform these roles. When women are capable of more, these practices have always kept them inside a particular boundary. There is a link between several factors and women's leadership in the social setting. In essence, everyone, even women, is impacted by social values. The social values placed on men differ from those placed on women. In this regard, Ansika shared her views:

I feel awful that I was born as a girl. Being a woman to be in this position is very challenging. Despite the family support, I have struggled hard. If there were a man, they would be free of all these personal responsibilities and biased

> *perceptions. We thank everyone, and people in society think that getting support from a husband is a big gift, but why is it not implicated in the case of men? Why do people not say that his wife is so supportive that she cooks for his family? We had a flattened rice mill, so he made about 150 kg of flattened rice. So, I used to clean that flattened rice every night. In this way, I also helped him.*

Her question is the answer to the status of women in our society. Her narrative shows that the perception regarding women in our society is still biased. Similarly, Mahat and Aithal (2022) also found that women in Nepal have always been considered subordinate citizens born to serve men and reproduce. They further stated that many women have suffered abuse throughout history in the name of culture and social norms. Suppose women have access to necessities, such as educational opportunities, help with household work, or caring for the baby. In that case, it is viewed as luck, whereas if males have the same opportunities, it is viewed as a right for them. Further, she shared:

> *In our society, there is the myth that household work is the significant responsibility of women only, which decreases the potential and dedication of women teachers as they can give less time for their professional responsibilities. I have observed very closely that female teachers are always hurrying to go home just after the bell rings. Some of them carried bags earlier (laughed), but at the same time, male teachers discussed with their friend circle. Sometimes, they come to me and discuss if there are any issues or some new ideas. If not, they go somewhere to have tea together, where they build up a personal relationship. That means at the time of selection of a new head teacher after my working tenure, and I will recommend the person who can give extra time to the school and other colleagues also support the candidate who has good personal relations within the staff even having the same educational qualification and experience.*

The male-dominated culture influences daily working practices, and evidence suggests that exclusion from networks limits career advancement opportunities (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016). The above discussion shows that there is a perception in our society that household work and taking care of the baby are the prime duties of the woman or a kind of written agreement at her home. They are more engaged in household chores rather than their professional responsibilities, which directly affects them to

enhance their career. Shrawantika also had the same experience and observation, which I have presented below:

> *Viewing women in leadership from a social perspective is different. School management committees, male teachers, and others often feel comfortable with male leaders. Do you know why? I feel that they go to have tea together in extra time and share, but we ladies do not. We are unable to be available all the time we cannot. We have boundaries, we have family, and we have to manage school as well. However, we cannot do so because of our social circle. First, we do not have free time, so everything affects us.*

Why do females only have the boundaries? Why not male? She remarked that society and male counterparts are uncomfortable working with female leaders since they share extra time, and societal norms restrict women. Based on the above narration, it can be estimated that women leaders still suffer from negative societal perspectives. However, a significant gap remains in the practice of equal treatment. Further, Ansika expressed her opinion, which I have presented below:

> *With time, thoughts have changed, and society has started accepting women as leaders. It was not in the early days when I was appointed as a teacher. However, when it comes to your family members, they are happy that you are in the position but do not fully support you. Because they still expect you to be a caretaker or household worker. We have grown up in a culture where women are still seen as followers only.*

Women's standing is improving in comparison. Although some people have begun accepting women in leadership positions, some practical issues remain resolved. Similarly, Rachayeeta had shared her experience and observation:

> *People do not trust women leaders in our society as they doubt whether they will run a successful school. I also have faced some disrespectful behavior, such as not greeting. Some senior teachers (by age) were not ready to accept my leadership as I was so young. So I started greeting them, and that kind of behavior slowly changed.*

As our society is used to seeing men in leadership positions, it is still not fully prepared to accept women in leadership positions. She also experienced such behavior

during the starting days of her leadership, as per her explanation that disrespectful behavior was not just due to gender but also by age. At the same time, she suggested that to change the perception of society, we women need to prove ourselves with resiliency. Not only that, but she also believed that there has been a significant change in the perception of people in society. Regarding this, she shared her views:

> *I have observed recent changes, and most people I meet believe that there is less corruption where there is women's leadership. I do not know whether they are telling the truth or just flattering. However, they used to say. It is seen practically. Most of the schools led by women's head teachers are a kind of idol. In this regard, I feel there has been a thought in our society that women are needed in leadership in school. I do not know about other professions, but about school leadership, I have listened and observed that most people, seniors, or higher authorities have heartily accepted women in leadership. There has been a change in the perception of women in leadership because we have proved ourselves.*

However, Shrawantika had shown some dissatisfaction with the biased perception of society toward accepting women in leadership. When I asked her about the perception of people regarding women's leadership, she shared:

> *It differs as per place. Right? In our locality, people also see me as a woman who stays home and cooks food. Even if they (Males) are "authachhap" they never lack in showing manhood. By this, we can assume whether or not they are accepting women's leadership.*

According to her narratives, it is clear that we have moved toward the 21st century, but still, there is a biased perception of women's leadership. Male dominance is prevailing in practice. Our society is still not fully prepared to accept the women in leadership. There are specific communities in our country where women are still expected to look after the home or to be subordinate to men if they work.

Similarly, Binika had some bad experiences in the beginning days of her leadership. She expressed:

> *Male teachers try to dominate women, such as by criticizing intelligence and complaining without any reason. I tolerate much. In starting the position of head teacher, I got lots of torture, even though I could not sleep for about a month.*

> *Since I am facing all those tortures now, I am stronger than I was in that phase. There was a group of male teachers who never supported me in meetings. In my experience, female teachers favored me, but male teachers were jealous. Similarly, my family also used to say, "The whole day you stay out of the house, you are at home now, so do all the work." They feel that when I am out of the house, it is for enjoyment and roaming only.*

The subjectivity I sensed from her story is that becoming a head teacher is challenging, especially as a woman. Some males in our society are still in a dilemma about leading the school by women's head teacher. In a male-dominated mindset, social expectations see women in less professional responsibility and keeping personal roles as a critical responsibility. Also, the problems women faced included judgments about their ability, unfair treatment based on their gender, and limitations on their decisive roles (Subedi & Shrestha, 2023). Further, Shrawantika shared her story below:

> *When I started my teaching career, there was the concept that female teachers were only to teach Nepali and social. They used to wonder about teaching math by female teachers. My family also raised the question about my leadership. They said, "It is okay to teach; you are earning, and that is enough." Families are afraid that she will be less involved in family responsibilities after taking the leadership position*

Based on the above narration, it is revealed that even though women's representation is increasing in teaching (UNICEF, 2022), they are considered followers who select easy subjects. It demonstrates that society is not ready to welcome women in challenging roles. Similarly, women are still overwhelmingly connected with the home realm and nurturing, extended family duties. Therefore, the family is afraid of a woman's less involvement in family responsibilities if she becomes a leader. That indicates women still suffer from social norms and values on the way to leadership.

Role Dilemma of Women

When a difficulty cannot be handled, people frequently encounter a dilemma in life. Similarly, in this research study, it was shared by the women head teachers that women have also expressed difficulty when deciding between options when making personal or professional decisions.

We must acknowledge the dual traits of female leaders who fill numerous roles to achieve gender equality from the perspective of both the physical and social sexes. Although policy and society support equal employment for women, it has created a rigid culture that forces them to balance work and family, with the family serving as both the primary and secondary firm. Women in the household still spend a lot of time and energy on housework. From a woman's perspective, housework is unquestionably a significant barrier to her development (Huang, 2020). Women frequently find themselves in a bind when faced with this kind of discrimination since they cannot entirely rely on one another. The competition and promotion opportunities for women heads and the tension between employment and family or household chores strongly impact teachers. Regarding this, I have presented below the experience and observations of Ansika:

> *Female teachers are always in a hurry to go home as they have to do household work after going home; they are always worried about their children's feeding, but male teachers are never in a hurry. If I need help to do some interoffice work, then males are always ready and available to do it, but I found females are somehow passive in all these works. When I inquired about their haste to go home, some of them answered that if they reached home late, they would be questioned by their in-laws, and others said there was no one at home to feed their children.*

After hearing about Ansika's experience and observation, I learned that female teachers struggle when prioritizing office work and household work. As Ansika said, they are always hurrying to reach home when the school bell rings. Sometimes, they do not feel relaxed after hearing the bell ring. The female teachers seem more concerned about reaching home rather than staying at school and completing school tasks first. However, if you see male teachers, they are never in a hurry to go home, and if asked to give some extra time after school, they never say no. However, if you ask a female teacher to stay back after school time, they are never ready. From this event, I felt that female teachers are always in a dilemma when deciding whether to prioritize gender or professional roles. Because female teachers prioritize their roles, they cannot enhance themselves and fight for higher positions, leading to women's underrepresentation in leadership. Further, she added her experience;

After taking the position of the head teacher, I was also in a dilemma because my children used to complain about reaching home lately, meetings on holidays, and being unable to manage time to cook for them, care for them, and love them. I felt terrible about all these things but did not focus more on them. I was not more concerned about looking after my house and my children as all the necessary care was provided by my mother-in-law. Since I had prioritized my professional role somewhere, I knew they would feel proud of my position and dedication to my work. Thankfully, the golden days are here, and my children appreciate me and feel proud of my dedication. One fine morning, I was making omelets in the kitchen, and my son hugged me from behind and said, " Mom, I am very proud of you. Whenever I am in a bad situation at school, this event gives me immense pleasure.

Winning over the dilemma regarding personal and professional roles leads to achieving a higher goal. Sometimes, social values come on the way to our success, and in the meantime, if we can make the right decision at the right time, there will be no dilemma in performing the role. It is one's decision to go after a personal life or achieve a professional role. If Ansika had left the dream of becoming a head teacher to think about her children only, she would have never heard his son's beautiful words of appreciation. Now, she feels happy with the decision she made. Deciding without being in a dilemma has improved the participation of women in leadership. It has cut down the representation of underrepresentation. Similarly, while conversing with her, I found Rachayeeta very clear about her personal and professional responsibilities. However, she shared her observation, which I have narrated below:

We feel that if we do not cook, our family will not get food; if we do not iron, our husbands will not look handsome. Who set all these things in our minds? No one has set all these things in our minds; we females have set these things in our minds. Due to that thought, we are always in a dilemma about our priorities. We give more priority to our family and our kids than our profession. Most women are unclear about their future, whether they need to make their own identity or just to be recognized by their husband's name. As per my close observation, if a female gets an opportunity to be the leader, she also denies it because of decision-

> *making authority. I mean, she has to ask about taking that offer of leadership. As I am the witness of my close friend, who is very good having all the qualities and qualifications to be a leader, I rejected the head teacher's offer. Her husband said to reject as he showed the reason for small children and also about managing the household responsibilities. Her husband also said, "You have a kind of 10 to 4 job; what do you need more "? And so on. However, now she regrets her dilemma for not taking the head teacher position she made at that time.*

Her (Rachayeeta) narration made me question whether women have decided to prioritize their family on their own rather than a profession or whether our societal norms lead them to have such beliefs. She stated that women have come to accept that their primary responsibility is to care for their families and do all household chores. However, Pokhrel (2020) has stated that society has divided the responsibility of women in raising families and caring for children. It gave us the impression that women had the unfavorable belief that their families came before their careers, either because of social expectations or because they possessed this belief. Therefore, they are always in a dilemma regarding personal and professional roles. Similarly, in the context of Nepal, due to a patriarchal system, women have unequal power relationships and gender-based hurdles (ADB, 2010). Due to that unequal power relation, women are in a dilemma in making the right decision at the right time. Being a teacher is a lifelong career that requires you to make the right decision in challenging situations (Börü, 2020). However, it seems that women are in a dilemma when choosing their personal and professional roles. Women depend on their husbands to decide their careers. Similarly, Shrawantika revealed her experience regarding the role dilemma: women cannot decide about their capabilities. Women have a feeling that they are physically weak so that they do not want to be involved in physical activities, including some uncertain challenges come at school. She stated:

> *When talking about physical activities such as sports activities, female teachers do not want to be involved, but male teachers are always on the front line about all these activities. Female teachers are still good about games; they do not play, but male teachers play with the students. So, I feel there is a need for males and females to maintain balance in school. There is a need for both; just for example,*

> *as you know, we faced an incident where physical violence had happened against one teacher by some parents. At that time, male teachers were in front to solve the problem, but there was no female teacher. I observed that they do not want to be involved in trouble. As per my experience and observation, males are more ready to act than females to explore the right thing in difficult situations. It might be because female representation is lower, but whoever is in leadership is very honest about their responsibilities.*

Based on the conversation with Shrawantika, most female teachers do not want to be involved in physical activities or get in trouble, primarily related to physical strength. Setting goals and frequently having the courage to take calculated risks are both essential components of leadership. There must be a balance between seeking and avoiding danger since we cannot advance without taking chances (Gurr & Drysdale, 2020). If a teacher, either male or female, avoids the challenging situation and takes a back step, then he/she is supposed to be in a dilemma about his/her role and responsibilities towards the institutional goal. To be a head teacher, he/she should be capable of facing the hurdles on her journey. Subedi and Shrestha (2023) found that women leaders faced difficulties in their journey. A variety of obstacles stood in their way of obtaining their leadership positions. Similarly, Shrawantika expressed that female teachers are in a dilemma about their role, which may negatively affect women's participation in leadership.

Discussion and Reflection

In the above section, the participants' narratives have been categorized into different themes, which helped me understand the reality of the opportunities and obstacles female school head teachers face. The participants' narratives supported me in revealing the journey of leadership, which was not a simple endeavor and could be tied to chance or destiny (Dwivedi, 2021). It is about the determination to fulfill the dream of becoming a leader (Bernasconi, 2019). Hence, female head teachers have encountered different challenges, so the discussion is made from a feminist discourse standpoint about women's challenges in achieving the head teacher position.

The participants' narration revealed the uncertainty regarding their leadership journey. This is primarily due to the traditional concept of women, which is confined by gender-based duties and responsibilities. Regardless of how well-educated and career-

oriented a woman is, she must fit into the caretaker position and do all household responsibilities (Helterbran & Rieg, 2004). If the family supports women to follow their goals, society will challenge them. Because women are often viewed as inferior to males, the path is not as straightforward as it appears. Liberal feminists also believe that women face discrimination because they are constantly viewed first as women and then as human beings (Dalal, 2015). The journey of women head teachers may appear beautiful, but three out of four participants had a long struggle ahead of them.

The concept of equality that nineteenth-century feminists applied to their campaign for women's rights arose from liberal political philosophy, which stated that all people should be equal, with no special privileges or rights (Lorber, 2010). However, the study revealed that still the roles are viewed based on sex, which created challenges in the way my participants (women head teachers).

Despite gender bias, all my participants claimed their self-confidence and persistence got them to head teacher positions. One of my participants, Ansika, said that if people can use obstacles as sources of inspiration, they might be able to achieve the goal. Obstacles can teach people the actual value of hard work or create opportunities. Nevertheless, for it, confidence and determination are necessary. Confidence and determination are essential to accomplishing goals on both personal and professional levels. Being a leader means making a sustained commitment to carrying out meaningful tasks. Leaders want to achieve the goal, and ongoing participation is crucial. I learned more about the journey of leadership through the participants' anecdotes, which was made possible by their persistent efforts and hard work. Long-term dedication is required for leadership; short-term plans and efforts are not sufficient (Dwivedi, 2021).

From the liberal feminist perspective, Rosemarie (1989) argues that in the liberal feminism paradigm, women's power to retain their equality is by their actions and choices. In this study, participants attained the head teacher position through hard work, determination, and family and community support. Liberal feminism does not actively challenge the system or ideology that supports women's oppression; instead, it works to integrate women into society without any discrimination. Rachayeeta, one of my participants, mentioned that she had noticed women's lack of confidence stemming from their upbringing. She explored the idea that we live in a culture where male family

members decide on behalf of female family members. Women lack decision-making abilities and self-confidence as a result. She also mentioned that, in Nepal, women's lack of decision-making skills and self-confidence makes it difficult to advance into leadership roles. The ability to deal with difficult situations and make judgments that benefit the organization is crucial for everyone in a leadership role. Attainment of total equality between sexes, liberal feminism uses social, legal, and economic means (Saqib, 2016). However, my participants found bias in how male and female family members are raised in our nation. In this regard, liberal feminists argue that everyone is created equal and should have access to the same opportunities (Effiong, 2020). According to O'Brien and Allin (2022), through a transformational theory approach to studying the collected information, it is found that shifts took place mostly around confidence and an inner authentic sense of self due to the supportive environment. Moreover, Seitchik (2020) also found that women have less self-confidence than men, which shows that women struggle to get support from the family or society where they reside. In contrast, if individuals do not receive equal opportunities, such as equal education or equal support for home chores, they may be limited in their ability to advance to higher positions.

My study participants came from different ages and social backgrounds. Furthermore, collected information suggests that women faced high gender bias in obtaining equal educational opportunities from the 1980s to the 1990s. Similarly, women from remote areas or families with low educational backgrounds did not have equal access to educational opportunities. Meanwhile, Dalal (2015) stated that liberal feminists believed in the power of education as a resource for social reform and a key to equal opportunity and advancement in one's profession. Literacy and education may raise awareness, undermining such gender preconceptions and questioning their supposed legitimacy. In any event, as the results show, the sufferer of such treatment and limitations is a woman who lacks equal chances, such as education. She bears significantly more harm than man in this social structure. Therefore, liberal feminism was introduced, which raised voices to demand equality for fundamental rights such as education, jobs, and decision-making independence (Herouach, 2019).

Women are often perceived to be friendly and humble, with the ability to tolerate challenges due to their temperament (Silva & Mendis, 2017). Based on my observation

and the discussion with the participants of this study, I agree with the statement. According to Bilal et al. (2021), employees whom women lead develop a bond and trust with them, which fosters innovation among coworkers. Where the statement of Silva and Mendis is associated with transformative leadership characteristics. All participants found that these characteristics helped them to create a favorable environment and connections with their subordinates at the school. At the same time, three participants out of four shared that gaining everyone's support is an opportunity to advance one's abilities, but sometimes, a woman's accomplishments can be impeded by her maternal nature. Women can occasionally feel threatened or dominated by others due to their maternal instinct.

Moreover, my first participant had seen certain employees disregard behavior due to her soft nature. According to Beasley (1999), liberal theory contends that women are subjected to unfair societal treatment and confront artificial impediments while seeking public office. Where Liberal feminists avoid supporting particular ideas of the good life for men or women, preferring to support what individuals can seek in life, and they reject strong statements about gender distinctions that may promote unequal and possible hierarchical rights and social positions (Mukul, 2022). However, in some situations, they felt transformations within their nature of working because of the dominance of some colleagues or the people around them. Women leaders have identified their role as transformative leaders, where they can make both positive and negative impacts in their leadership journey.

Three out of four participants in my research said they must prioritize their family over their interests and professional responsibilities, which oppress their calibre for leadership. All of the participants in my study stated that, as opposed to schoolwork, women (female teachers) are more focused on their responsibilities, such as caring for their families, raising their children, and doing housework. Furthermore, after accepting the role, Ansika, and Binika, two of my participants, faced difficulties for a while. Because it was tough for them to balance their personal and work lives, later, they proved that overcoming barriers and hurdles and carrying out professional duties are equally crucial to obtaining equal opportunities. Liberal feminism believes that women who prioritize more to home chores or family care than men have less time to take advantage of possibilities to advance in their careers (Oxley, 2011). They believe men and women

should equally perform domestic duties. Generally, all feminist concepts attempt to describe women's oppression, explain its causes and consequences, and provide liberation strategies for emancipation (Tong, 20018). Prevailing legal policies do not exclude women from becoming head teachers or holding positions of higher authority (Poudel, 2022), but the masculine nature and patriarchal system have created a dilemma regarding women's prioritization of personal and professional responsibilities. Liberal feminism talks about giving men and women the same opportunities. They are simply different, not any less valued. Women prioritize their obligations above all else. Is it due to nature's different nature? Or is it the feminist perspective that they believe they are confined to managing their household, or is it because of the way society constructs gender roles? A question concerning liberal feminism also arises: Is it sufficient to talk about equal opportunities, or do equal professional responsibilities also need to be addressed to acquire opportunities?

A significant positive change has been seen in women's empowerment in Nepal; still, it takes a long time to change existing societal norms, values, traditions, beliefs, and rituals associated with patriarchal culture (Enyew & Mihrete, 2018), such as in Nepal. Similarly, in this study, all the participants stated that they got support from their families to achieve the position, and with time, they got support from the rest of the institution of society. However, they still feel that gender-biased treatment and lack of self-confidence are barriers on the way of women’s achievement. Women have historically used gender-related issues as a springboard to forge their leadership identities since they are equally capable of running institutions (Bhatti & Ali, 2021).

Essence of Chapter

This chapter was written in response to the study's initial research question. It included participants' various stories and experiences on the journey to the head teacher position. I divided their shared stories into distinct categories based on their situation. They have distinct experiences, whether personally, socially or professionally. Similarly, I have created meaning in the stories of my participants using liberal theory and transformational leadership theory.

CHAPTER- V
STORIES REFLECTING ON TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

This chapter includes the narration of those women head teachers of public schools who participated in this study by highlighting how women head teachers carry their leadership role and transform themselves to empower and encourage their followers and create a positive atmosphere for the school. Effective leadership in schools is increasingly seen as necessary if schools are to meet the wide-ranging goals that have been set (Bush, 2009). After collecting the participants' narration, I came across different themes related to the transformational leadership theory, which I had already reviewed.

Ansika as a Role Model

Change can be a difficult transition for employees, but outstanding leadership can help to inspire effective transformations. Similarly, head teachers have an essential role in shaping school culture. They are responsible for fostering excellent teaching and learning environments for staff and students. Leaders who are effective in developing a strong school culture encourage collaboration among teachers to ensure that best practices are shared and that every teacher or other staff collaborates toward the same goal (Dinsdale, 2017).

When I met my first participant, Ansika, I found her to be very humble and supportive. Her way of dealing with her co-workers was very polite and kind. It was my first meeting, but I sensed I had met several times. For this study, when I asked her about her perception and practice of the way of leading a school, she shared:

> *Teamwork is the perfect way to achieve organizational goals, so a friendly environment must exist. Whenever I need to decide, I think, re-think, and share it with my core team individually. After the approval of my core team, I call the meeting and discuss it with all the members of my school. Likewise, I give preference and priority to every one of us when making decisions. We need to take our subordinates together to achieve our common goal, which helps make them feel ownership of the institution.*

Based on her opinion, I could assume she has created a healthy environment where her subordinates support her to achieve the common goal. She believed in team work. If a head teacher inspires his/her followers to achieve more than they had planned, often more than they thought possible, it comes under transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). They set more outstanding standards for themselves and often accomplish better results by stimulating their followers. Further, she narrated:

> *Being a woman is not easy to balance my personal and professional life, but I have to balance my personal and professional responsibilities, which encourages other staff. Where there is a will, there is a way. I also work hard and support my family. I support my husband for his business by waking the whole night in need, which is run by the house. I help my mother-in-law in the kitchen as needed and when they are available. However, I never compromise on my profession because, for my responsibilities, my family members are there to support me, but about professional responsibilities, I am only responsible for my responsibilities, which are directly associated with the future of women who aspire to be head teachers. Similarly, in Nepal's context, women's leadership plays a vital role in changing the negative perception of society (women are caretakers or followers only). If women are in leadership positions, other women can also be motivated to become empowered. I never give up, even in challenging situations, because women leaders can also be role models for others.*

Balancing personal and professional life is not easy, especially when the responsibility is related to women, because socio-cultural issues have limited women's access to managerial roles as women have to focus more on house hold chores, as I have discussed in Chapter IV. However, she had been balancing the challenging situation, encouraging other women to dream of higher positions. However, she supports and gives opportunities for career enhancement to her employees, which encourages her subordinates to be creative and innovative for the betterment of the school. Further, she adds:

> *I listen to them, encourage them, and, most importantly, discuss possible challenges with every staff member and prepare them to face them, which helps to develop the confidence to fight against unnecessary challenges. Similarly, after*

holding this position, I have given all the staff opportunities for different trainings for organizational performance and empowering our staff. That is why our staff always share that they feel comfortable discussing new ideas for the betterment of the school and their problems, too. In case of any mistakes by our employees, I never make them feel in mass. I always suggest individually.

Similarly, I help them with their problems as well. So, I think all these things motivate them to achieve the organizational goal. I will tell you about one incident this year: a teacher refused to teach a lesson since there were 45 students, despite the established routine. The section could not be divided because there were only 45 pupils. Despite my repeated requests, she refused to attend class. There should only be 40 based on the criteria. That is why she refused to take class. I consoled her to separate once the number of students exceeded this, helped her to calm down, and explained the ramifications of doing so.

On the other hand, every other teacher opposed her actions and stood with me. However, I took control of the matter and prevented terrible things from happening. At last, she consented and commenced attending the class. She apologized afterward for her actions.

Understanding how to engage employees is the key component of transformational leadership. Employees who are adequately motivated through goals, recognition, and rewards help to bring about positive change in the organization. With evidence of her leadership practice and narration, it can be said that she motivates her subordinates because she respects every individual's self-respect and increases the confidence to fight with challenges. Her support in reframing the challenges and approaching old circumstances in new ways indicates that she possesses the quality of transformational leadership, who encourages her followers to be imaginative and creative, as creativity is valued for personal and organizational enhancement (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Her views reflect that she is doing her best to develop her subordinates as a head teacher. Listening to her, I feel that her purpose is to moderate, encourage, and motivate the subordinates to create a healthy environment at school. While doing so, she was also aware of increasing the participation of women in leadership. She believed "women for

women" is needed to increase women's participation in education. Her story gives me a vision that women in leadership contribute to empowering women. Her leadership develops women's confidence in dealing with challenges. Her shared experience shows that she works for her followers and can transform herself positively and create a respectful place in society. Further, she shared:

> *Before holding the head teacher position, I was respected in my society and family as I was socially active, helpful, and gentle. However, after holding this position, I got more respect from my society in all the social activities or programs I am being invited to, and most importantly, my society people believe me if I share my ideas to bring any program for the betterment of my society. Before holding this position, I was known and respected inside my society, but after reaching this position outside of society and in different educational offices, I am also known and respected, which makes me feel so happy and confident.* She smiled and said *I have been working in a profession for so long. Even if you were not born (laughed), working as a teacher or holding a leadership position is very different. Previously, I was not so confident and hesitated to deal with the different educative officers. However, now I am confident with my responsibilities. I feel that there is nothing that I cannot do. Similarly, after holding this position, I got more respect from my family and society, which made me feel that I needed to do something for my society, and I started doing some social work, such as managing drinking water.*

Apart from her school leadership, she managed to execute social work, adding her recognition in the community. She faced many hurdles in her leadership journey, which I have explained in Chapter IV, but nothing could stop her enthusiasm. She could practice all her positive side properly after being appointed head teacher. She is the one who struggles in her life to make a balance between family and work without disturbing any role. It was difficult for her to achieve this position since she was the only girl who fought for education and still worked actively as a head teacher at 58. Now, everyone respects her, and her children are proud of her. Similarly, she taught her followers and stimulated them to face the challenges and enhance their capabilities for the betterment of

school and society. When I asked my first participant, where do you see yourself in your school? She said;

> *I have been employed at this school since 2041 and have held the head teacher position for 12 years." Without the team's support, I could not carry out my responsibilities as head teacher. Every single person at my school has supported me throughout my career. I'll share with you one of my experiences of this year. Owing to my older age and extensive job experience, I considered leaving this year. However, all of my coworkers (aside from one or two teachers) were upset and were pleading with me to stay. They expressed a desire to work under my direction. Instead, they asked that you split your duties among us, take on less, and serve as our guides. Women are still only viewed as followers. Our culture has conditioned us to view women primarily as caregivers. My work and demeanor have earned me a special place in their hearts if my colleagues are pleading with me to continue as head teacher in this kind of society.*

Her commitment to her work, her manner of working, and how she treated parents, students, and subordinates made her an idol among the people around her. Therefore, her colleagues were not ready to let her resign from the post of head teacher. I have observed her moral behavior. When I visited her school, she was preoccupied with exam-related duties when I met her for the first time, as it was our previously scheduled meeting. She requested that I wait for a moment. I loved how she asked me and expressed her regret. As I was waiting for a while, one of her coworkers arrived to bid goodbye to her because his shift had ended. She discussed her professional responsibility and struggles to moderate our pre-informed conversation. Her colleague presented very well to her, who asked to share her exam-related obligations with him. She hesitated since it was his free time to go home, and he had already finished his work. However, he persisted that she allowed him to assist her, and in the end, she gave her responsibilities to her colleague and began a conversation with me. That demonstrates her morals toward her responsibilities, her coworkers, and humanity.

Her continuous enthusiasm despite all odds, positive attitude, and balanced, friendly nature point out the traits of transformational leadership; in this regard, it can be said that she is a role model for her society and followers. It is the idealized impact that

equates to the attractive traits of the leaders. Offering a logical vision affects people and prepares them for change. Furthermore, her plans and visions are trusted and believed by their followers. As a result, followers work under the direction of transformative leaders to accomplish the objectives set forth by the organization (Shrestha, 2020).

Rachayeeta as a Creator: Motivate Followers for Critical Thinking

My participant, Rachayeeta, was selected as a head teacher at a very young age (33 years) and had a creative, talented, and dynamic personality. When I first met her, I was impressed with her bold personality. The way she interacted with me made me easily assume that she was the one who could lead the school with advanced and creative ideas and a humble nature. I observed her school closely and found that every corner was used wisely. The class decoration was child-friendly, so anyone can understand that the school uses a child-centered methodology. A good leader can bring many changes in a school, such as performance improvement and outcomes, more resilience and agility, increased engagement and retention, and more vital collaboration and diversity, which I found in her leadership when I met her multiple and observed her working style. Therefore, it can be said that the leadership qualities of my participants were in the form of a transformational leadership style (Jogulu & Wood, 2006). For more to understand her leadership and contribution as a women head teacher, her stories are mentioned with her narration below:

> *Our school was running well when I was chosen as head teacher. However, it was exam-oriented and guided by technical ideas like 10 to 4, and teacher-centered pedagogy was used. It was suitable for that time. However, now the times has been changed. When I came here for the very first time in this school, one thing that bothered me was that the color of the class was like half part of the wall (lower) was black, and half part was white (upper) (laughed). There were so many boring classrooms, which always bothered me.*
>
> *Nevertheless, when I was appointed head teacher, the first thing I changed was the color of the class because, in my opinion, the class should be colorful and catchy to create a learner-centered environment. Our school had no space to expand physically, so I started working on soft skills or software, where we mainly focused on converting teacher-centered pedagogy to learner-based*

pedagogy. Mainly, we worked on learner or learning-based pedagogy by using the available space wisely. I also worked from two perspectives: one was the academic portion, and the other was the physical activities.

She believed that creating a child-friendly environment helps to enhance learners' abilities. Therefore, she started working with her team on physical and academic parts after being appointed head teacher. That shows her devotion to her profession as a good leader. Therefore, I was curious to know how she has been working to enhance her personally and professionally to her followers. Then she shared:

Yes, there is a difference. There is a soft corner in females. I mean, teachers or students can feel the feelings of motherhood or a kind of familiar environment. I do not know whether they are saying right or not. You may ask my teachers as well, but my teachers used to say that when there was a male headteacher, they used to run away in fear of meeting him. (Laughed loudly) However, nowadays, if they bring some delicious food for tiffin, they call me to take it. That means there is no hesitation in talking or sitting with me. That is why I feel that happened, and that is because of female leadership.

She believed that women are friendly, so the followers can easily discuss issues related to their personal and professional lives. Based on her narration, I believe that she followed transformational leadership as a source of employee trust and connectivity, which led to innovative behavior among employees in her school (Bilal et al., 2021). She believed that autocratic leadership is only to maintain discipline that also works for a specific time. She added:

I do not believe the school can run smoothly with autocratic leadership or strictness because our previous head teacher ran our school strictly. However, he set the system. I appreciate that, but now, after his retirement, no one respects him due to his strictness. Another thing is that in this era, autocratic leadership does not work. We have to move ahead together, empowering all. Right? For example, if I tell a teacher to follow the integrated curriculum but he/she is unaware of the integrated curriculum, that does not work. First of all, I have to empower them regarding that issue, and also, I have to make them learn and facilitate them as needed. For example, some teachers in pre-primary do not

arrange the children's bags; however, there is a cupboard. For that, I followed up about ten days. I even said to students, "Ma'am does not teach you?" In this way, I follow up continuously. Without continuous follow-up, it is not possible.

Her narration assured me that she is a leader who considers the quality of teaching and learning activities and fosters her followers to rise together. She had much understanding that to attain the school's shared purpose, a head teacher should make the followers aware or learn if they are unknown or irresponsible. Darling-Hammond (2022) also stated that effective principals communicate with teachers in instructional-focused interactions through feedback mentoring and support for professional development and professional learning communities. In terms of her participation in personal growth and development as a teacher, she said:

I have heard but not seen when there was a head, sir, the offer letters of training used to get thrown into the garbage, which means (laughed) we did not get the opportunity to amplify our professional skills. I could not complete my TPT until there was a male head teacher. However, after appointing as a head teacher, I have implemented the rule that without hampering our classes, you can go wherever you want to go for your personal growth, such as teacher workshops, CDC to write the books, training, virtual classes, and all that as I also go for all these activities for my personal and professional growth.

In some situations, getting an opportunity is enough to grow personally and professionally, which she has been providing. I understand that she knew the value of personal and professional growth in amending the school environment. However, intellectual stimulation, one of the pillars of transformational leadership, emphasizes the ability to inspire followers to bring up extra abilities, and she is doing her best for the school and her followers. She is not interested in convincing her teams to conform. Instead, she empowers people by providing support while allowing them to develop and participate (Ray, May 7, 2020). Similarly, When I asked a question, as a female head teacher, how have you been motivating women to be empowered, she shared:

As a female, being in leadership is a kind of challenge. Right? We also have a kind of bother at home, but if we try to manage it, then it is possible. In our school, teachers also asked about my time management. However, I multitask; for

example, I do household chores while talking on the phone. Alternatively, I used to listen to fruitful lectures while cooking. Therefore, I suggest multitasking to my friends as well. Otherwise, it is tough to manage time. Women cannot do anything. There are only 24 hours. Therefore, we must give our 100 percent while doing our responsibilities without wasting time. So I suggest the same; our female teachers are more inspired and motivated.

Her life has been filled with a wide range of experiences. Educated women appear to have equal duties at home and work. Moreover, women bothered by more family responsibilities impact their professional path. The conventional view of men as breadwinners and women as caregivers has evolved (Lease, 2003), and males have also started to be involved in the household. However, for women who are still in the dilemma of prioritizing the family role and work, she can be the ideal example of balancing both. Her working skills impress me as she has been utilizing her every second wisely. The way she had been working may not resonate with everyone, but it may bring confidence and motivation to the women around her. Similarly, women in senior positions inspire other women to strive for higher positions. She added:

People do not trust women leaders in our society as they doubt whether they will run a successful school. I also have faced some disrespectful behavior, such as not greeting. Some senior teachers (by age) were not ready to accept my leadership as I was so young. So, I started greeting them; likewise, that kind of behavior slowly changed. When you start proving yourself, those things will slowly decrease. You should be resilient.

Nepal has a patriarchal system, and still, our society does not accept women as head teachers. There are lots of discussions going to include women, and policies will also be formulated. However, in society, people still appreciate male head teachers more. Based on her narration, I found that women in the position of head teacher are still underestimated in comparison to men because patriarchal power structures influence the workplace as well. At the same time, she articulated that if you proved yourself with your ability to lead the school, you can gain trust and acceptance. In this regard further, she shared:

> *I have seen that most of the schools led by women headteachers run systematically; those schools are a kind of idol. In this regard, I feel there has been a thought in our society that women are needed in leadership in school.*

She claimed that our societal perspective has been gradually changing, and in the educational sector, people have started believing in women as head teachers. Her statement shows that all these happened because of women's transformational leadership style and our country's policies. She also discussed how she overcame obstacles in her journey of performing her responsibilities and inspired those around her:

> *As shown in the portfolio, I was the only eligible applicant, but the primary, secondary, and whole teachers were older by age. They never said it to me directly, but I could sense they were not ready for me to take on a leadership role because they thought I was still too young and that I would only be the junior in the group. Additionally, they reasoned that there was no reason to make any changes since everything was proceeding as it was. Getting them to trust me and fit them into one frame was so challenging initially. I first began to build a positive relationship with them. Then, I started working on the academic and physical structure of the school. The classrooms were dull prior to my appointment as head teacher. For teaching and learning activities to be practical, the classroom should be fascinating, joyful, and learner-centered. So, with the support of all the teachers and students, we began decorating the classrooms. I established a rule stating that each teacher and student was to decorate their class, and the class with the most fabulous decoration would get a prize at the end of the session. We delegated authority to the art teacher, the school administrator, and a few subject teachers to announce the best class.*

Because she was too young, it was difficult for her to carry out the duties of head teacher. Since her coworkers were not prepared to acknowledge their junior as the leader, they were initially unsupportive whenever she presented innovative ideas for implementation. They reasoned that nothing needed to change because things were going as they were. Remaining courageous, she initiated a cordial conversation with her colleague and tried to persuade her. Ultimately, she could bind every student by utilizing several creative concepts when I visited her school. I had an opportunity to explore

around the classrooms as well. I could appreciate the exquisite decoration. For learners, there was unique information on each wall. For teaching purposes, teachers use lesson plans and chart paper. Anyone can assume that she is an innovative leader. She is likely well-respected as a good leader based on how instructors and students greeted her. She added:

> *Initially, I was frustrated because things were not going as I had planned. Even though I was too young to handle the conditions, I still strongly desired to make a big difference in the world. In certain instances, assignments remain unfinished. Moreover, over time, I learned by doing, but I never considered abdicating my responsibilities since I have a strong sense of responsibility and a somewhat stubborn character that has served me well as the school's leader. Even under challenging circumstances, I never give up.*

Despite being qualified in every way, she experienced obstacles not only because of her gender but also because she was younger than other teachers. It demonstrates that even when a leader works to bring about positive change in a school setting, followers with a negative attitude and traditional thinking create obstacles to a leader's unique leadership. Transformational leadership is about transforming the followers. However, the question arises about the transformational leadership theory: if the followers are biased towards the head teacher, how can a head teacher be an exemplary leader? However, as a head teacher, she began to uphold harmonious connections with her staff and concentrated on her responsibilities by avoiding all negativity, which ultimately enabled her to improve the school's education standard.

Although initially encountered difficulties as a head teacher, she never gave up. Her unwavering efforts, tenacity, and innovative ideas transformed the school and herself. She handled the challenging situation by applying her critical thinking and creative effort, encouraging teachers and students to think creatively in teaching-learning activities.

Shrawantika as an Inspirational Motivator

Leadership is a challenging position that requires both the ability to deliver results and the courage to tackle issues. Every leader faces challenges in their profession, but the leaders who overcome these challenges can give their staff the greatest service and

achieve an institution's common goal. A leader needs to keep sight of the goal and stick to their guns even when things go tough; a leader needs passion and resilience. Therefore, a head teacher should assist followers in feeling the same enthusiasm, passion, and determination to achieve the common goal of the school.

I found Shrawantika, a leader with a clear vision, passion, and determination. Her struggle to achieve the position of head teacher (explained in chapter 4) was appreciable. She believed you will face many challenges as a head teacher, but you will undoubtedly succeed if you have determination and patience. She found that females have more tolerance than males, and she believed that quick response leads a head teacher into a bad situation in some situations. In this regard, she shared:

> *What I found about tackling the issues is that females have more capacity for tolerance than males. Males show a quick response or emotion, but females show a high level of patience. We have a kind of calm nature, which means I feel I can also handle bad situations. I observed other teachers also; they do not control their anger, and the situation gets different. I found the difference in leadership style.*

Women are supposed to be more patient by nature, which helps them to handle challenging situations with patience. If someone in front of you is angry, another one should be calm to maintain peace. Moreover, a leader should interact with different people, including teachers and followers, and he or she may tackle different minds. Therefore, she believed that a leader with a calm and patient nature only handles the challenging situation. A leader who can face and overcome every challenge can be ideal for his or her followers. Similarly, she found that masculine leadership works for the time being, but if a leader works in a team, which works to achieve the common goal. Further, she shared:

> *I have noticed two things. A strict or masculine leadership style works only in your presence, but what I have observed is that, in my absence, our school also smoothly runs in the system. That is why I believe in teamwork rather than strictness. Teamwork, ownership, and transformational leadership are better ways to lead the school.*

She believed in a friendly nature and teamwork when leading the school. Meanwhile, she remembered that in some situations, a leader needs to be strict to handle the issues. In this regard, she said:

> *However, people are by nature like "aula dida dunulko nilnu" (laughed). If someone needed to go home, I quickly let them go, and another asked to go the next day. If I allowed them to go quickly, then school would suffer. Therefore, I have learned a lesson: We have to be strict, even though we don't want to be strict.*

Based on her narration, women are naturally kind-hearted, and being supportive toward their juniors affects her leadership role. Mostly, the nature of women is appreciated in the school context and for empowering followers. However, at the same time, she realized that the same leadership style does not work for all people all the time. In this regard, she added:

> *Maybe so many were there to learn! When I was appointed head teacher, I was unaware of registration and referee (Darta/Chalani). I was a mathematics teacher and was happy with my teaching. However, due to time and circumstances, I became a head teacher. There are written quotes on the ladder that always hit me: we should not wait for the right situation to act on the situation, and that will be correct. This quote has always had a significant impact on me. Then, I discussed with other friends that I have never been a head teacher and do not know the responsibilities. Then, my friends suggested and encouraged me that if I started working today, the next day would be two days, which encouraged me, and I determined to take the position. I know that experience comes through the act, and I encourage my friends, too. Some people or leaders are afraid of being dominated to make learning to other teachers, but I never.*

She was not aware of the transformation earlier, but after being appointed head teacher, she realized that she felt many changes in herself. A leader needed to be transformed, and she found lots of positive changes inside her, which she transformed to other followers as there is a saying, *"faleko hango najhukeko khaha chha ra?"* She believed that leadership is not identified by birth or is not a genetic inheritance. Instead of waiting for the right moment, you must select the moment and make it favorable to

yourself because leadership is acquired by determination and opportunity. Still, there is less participation of women in leadership, and Shrawantika claims that one of the reasons for the underrepresentation is that women are afraid of being involved in trouble. She narrated her opinion below:

> *As per my understanding, women do not want to be involved in trouble because the government has provided only five hundred rupees as the head teacher's allowance, but they need to carry the trouble of five lakhs, so why take unnecessary trouble? In my case, I struggled more to continue my studies for the M. Phil. My family was not optimistic about continuing my studies, but they were convinced afterward due to my determination. There are problems in every sector, but we have to struggle with them. Women especially need to struggle from home. If we struggle, we succeed. Therefore, some female teachers used to say, "Pahila ta himmat nai aaudaina thiyo, ahile hajur lai dekhera himmat aauchha" They used to say that they have earned self-confidence due to me.*

The challenge acts as an arena for brilliance. Every personal best leadership case involves a deviation from what is usual (Kouzes & Posner, 2023). As a leader, her struggle and overcoming of those challenges can be the learning for her followers, especially for those women who are afraid of moving forward because a leader's one of the responsibilities is to make aware of her followers to tackle the challenges as well, which she is doing. Similarly, she has continuously worked to empower her followers for personal and professional enhancement. She believed that a leader builds up hope, increases followers' dedication, and establishes an enjoyable and motivating outlook (Avoilio et al., 1999), no matter the situation. Further, she narrated her efforts:

> *I make plans by coordinating with our core team for effective classes. Sometimes what happens "bancharo lai pani bela bela ma arjapnu parchha, natra bodo hunchha." that is why sometimes I organize some motivational training, refreshment training and also I send our teachers compulsorily for different trainings invited by any medium.-government or different organization.*

It seems like she recognizes the importance of personal growth and development for staff and that if followers are well motivated, the school will advance. Besides making

all efforts for the school and followers, sometimes she also suffered from the disparity, which she narrated below:

> *Despite I am a qualified head teacher, I have faced the disparity based on gender. There was a program for head teachers in the municipality; when I went there, people greeted others but not me. Maybe they did not recognize me or did not expect a female as a head teacher. However, I have felt the disparity in many places. However, I did not lose hope. We should continue our work with honesty. Sooner or later, we get respect. If we have male and female head teachers to attend any program or municipality, the perception of women is still different. I have felt the disparity.*

According to Subramanian et al. (2016), as human civilization evolved, women acquired leadership traits such as ambition, self-reliance, and assertiveness to compete with men for all societal positions. This statement reflects that women struggle to achieve equal status in society. However, after taking her role as head teacher, a woman worked tirelessly to raise the standard of education in school and support her colleagues even under challenging circumstances. She added:

> *I have been working nonstop to improve my school, staff, and pupils since I was appointed head teacher. To raise the education standard and foster a healthy learning environment, I have organized training to help teachers develop their professional abilities, managed drinking water, and provided sanitary pads for female students and teachers. Everyone had to go home if they required the long toilet in the past, but that is now handled. For female teachers and students, sanitary pads are maintained. Now, girls talk about menstruation with ease, even with male teachers, whereas before, they would be embarrassed to ask for or discuss sanitary pads. When it comes to talking about menstruation, we used to be embarrassed. However, I made changes to all these during my leadership. I talk with my teachers' team about planning extracurricular or academic activities and assign roles appropriately. I consult my teachers and other concerned staff members before making any decisions, giving them a sense of ownership of their work. My efforts to implement unique teaching and learning activities through different trainings, motivation to work with the team, and how I maintain public*

relations inspire my followers to work harder to achieve our school's common goal.

She overcame obstacles, including discrimination and personal hardships, to become a successful head teacher by persevering and applying her experiences. She ran various programs in the school to improve teacher professionalism and the quality of education. People around her appreciate and admire her for her continuous focus and commitment to her profession and family. She is a true motivator to those working in the field of education.

In conclusion, Shrawantika exemplifies the traits of a successful leader by setting a high standard for herself and encouraging and motivating people around her. She has run the school effectively with the help of the parents and the entire school community. Her staff value her focused and well-organized leadership abilities.

Binika as a Believer of "Jasto Ropyo Ustai Falchha"

When I visited the school of my fourth participant, Binika, for an interview (for the second time), she was busy with administrative tasks. As a result, I waited for one and a half hours. During that moment, she came to see me three times to console me. Her actions made me think she is helpful, supportive, and kind. According to the ethics, there was no choice but to wait, but I was permitted to observe the school during that time physically. I also went to some classrooms with her consent, where I found that the school is well decorated and the teachers are likewise well dressed (in proper uniform).

Meanwhile, she (the head teacher) came outside and invited me for our discussion. While I followed her to her cabin, she was conversing with some female teachers about their uniforms, and I noticed that the uniform (pants and tops) was new in the school. I found her amiable. She was more concerned about her followers. Regarding this, she said:

As head teacher, I scheduled a two-day trip to a school outside the valley to learn about different teaching-learning approaches. My teachers were also joyful and energized as a result of that program. Similarly, to build a 5-year school plan, I prepared a full-day session in a resort. I oversaw the budget from the ward office, where I managed seven lakhs for school coloring, decoration, and some personal development training inside the school. I have been a head teacher for six months

and sent our teachers to several training sessions. If we do for them, they will do for you. "karma hits back, isn't it?"

Her story made me believe she is an excellent leader for her coworkers. She is concerned that a leader's behavior impacts followers' working reactions. When a follower's demands are consistently met, his or her vision shifts from a short-term self-interested mutuality of enhancing the performance encompassing a more attention review of the circumstances (Avolio & Bass, 1995). Maintaining frequent an open conversations, responding to the particular needs of employees, mentoring them, and acknowledging each person's unique contributions are the qualities of a good leader. A leader's consideration of his/her employees leads them to job happiness (Hanaysha, 2012). She believed a happy employee performs better; therefore, just after taking on the responsibilities of head teacher, she started working for the employee's happiness. If a head teacher is good to his or her followers, it benefits the followers or the school environment and helps change society. Further, she shared:

In our school, I have given the responsibility to our female teachers to teach female students about menstruation hygiene and sexual harassment. Earlier, female children used to feel shy to talk about menstruation and sanitary pads in front of males, but now it can be seen the change. In every house, daughters ask to buy pads for their fathers. In our era, we used to feel shy, but now the concept has changed, which could be possible only due to the tired efforts of our female teachers. Even our female teachers could have gained significant information about menstruation hygiene and sexual harassment due to that responsibility.

Based on my interaction with Binika, I realized she had been working to bring positive societal change. She encouraged her followers to contribute to society, which is the ultimate goal of every educational institution. One step in changing the negative perception towards biological features was the significant role of a leader. As Heiss (2023) stated, transformational leadership is the ability to motivate and encourage others toward a common goal; she is the one who encourages followers to perform for the betterment of the school and bring change in the concept of society. At the same time, it cannot be denied that women head teachers can understand better women's biological

changes, sexual harassment, and gender disparity. In this regard, she shared some sad story:

> *Instead of being motivated, some of them complain only about small things. Even though I made lots of effort from them, some do not admire my performance. So I feel bad. They know what I have done for the school but do not express it because they feel jealous. Especially male!*

Her last sentence made me think that it is due to gender differences. Still, our society is not ready to accept women in higher positions. Or does she need to work on her ability more? As per my study, different participants struggled more before achieving the position, but society and colleagues started believing in them after becoming head teachers a few times later. However, my participant Binika took the responsibility of head teacher just six months ago; therefore, this is a topic to study more that women must prove due to gender or she needs more time to gain confidence to lead the school. Or does she need to transform her leadership style as needed? In this regard, she shared:

> *Now my confidence level has increased to earlier days. I feel I have to be strong. I am familiar with everyone, but that is also not always good. I have been working here since the ground level and am friendly with everyone, but sometimes I feel we must be strict after holding the head teacher position.*

According to her story, confidence can be achieved through success. When she became head teacher, she gained the confidence. Meanwhile, she realized that one leadership style does not work in all situations. That denotes “just ropyo ustai falchha” because she became more familiar than needed, so she suffered in some situations. I am an academic leader and believe that leadership is about loving or being close to the followers and understanding the followers' code of conduct.

Discussion and Reflection

As Bunaiyan and McWilliams (2018) described, transformational leadership demonstrates special abilities that suit the education sector. The research significantly confirms the characteristics of all female teachers in my research area. Regardless of the situation, they always portrayed themselves as a clear, confident, and committed school leader. Transformational leaders raise awareness of the organization's aims and missions, which results in organizational change (Jogulu & Wood, 2006). All of the participants of

this study carried the characteristics of transformational leadership theory. Similarly, recent empirical research of managers by Mandell and Pherwani (2003) verifies this conclusion, reporting that females outperform males on the transformational leadership scale.

My participant, Ansika, is very cooperative, supportive, and humble with her followers. Transformational leaders who are responsive and supportive are seen favorably by their followers (Butler et al., 1999). Ideally, she leads her school because she carries out her professional tasks effectively with her team. She is always prepared to confront the obstacles that come her way and work to achieve a common goal of the institution. They are role models who inspire people to align around a vision, shared purpose, and mission (Bass et al., 1996).

According to Sharif (2019), in a culturally varied context, motivational variables may differ from person to person and from ethnic group to ethnic group. In my study, I noticed Rachayeeta as an influential, highly competent, and encouraging personality from a well-educated family. She urges her followers to be creative. Followers are asked for new ideas and creative problem solutions, and they are included in addressing problems and finding solutions. Followers are encouraged to attempt new techniques, and their ideas are not ridiculed because they differ from the leaders' ideals. She supports and assists in implementing new ideas with answers to difficulties as she is very talented and interested in implementing new ideas in her school. Furthermore, she is supposed to be the example of transformational leadership theory's intellectually stimulating leadership qualities because it allows the followers to use their strengths better (Bass & Riggio, 2017).

Shrawantika, a participant in my study, faced uncertain challenges in her leadership journey at work, but she managed them sensibly and encouraged her followers. She believed that every individual, male or female, has a distinctive potential that leaders need to develop and boost their confidence to overcome difficult situations and reach the school's common goal. Influential leaders build positive relationships with staff and individuals inside and outside the organization (Trinidad & Normore, 2004). That motivates their followers to work better in groups by making them aware of the challenges of their role. According to Bass and Riggio (2017), team spirit is aroused in

transformational leaders, and they behave in ways that motivate and inspire those around them by providing meaning and challenge to their followers' work. Meanwhile, leaders must be able to make sound decisions in challenging situations, and she has the fortitude to do so (Kapur, 2020).

An effective leader makes his or her followers feel concerned about them. Encouraging personal development among employees promotes learning and happy feelings that spread throughout the entire organization (Ogola et al., 2017). My participant, Binika, is the kind-hearted head teacher who thinks all the home members should work in the same place. According to Bass et al. (1996), a leader with the individual consideration features of transformational leadership recognizes and elevates the needs of the followers and encourages them to reach their full potential. Meanwhile, she was the one who conducted refreshment programs for her followers and took them to visit different educational institutions to encourage them as well as their individual and professional development. She treats her workplace and her followers in it with the same care every woman does at home (Febriantina, 2016).

Aside from all the leadership qualities or contributions mentioned above about the women head teachers in education, there are some gender-biased obstacles that women leaders must overcome to achieve their leadership goals. All the women head teachers who noted some significant issues pushing women out of leadership participated in this study. By taking into consideration how my participant's experience as a woman and a leader was impacted by her gender and other social identities in her workplace or to understand the discrimination that women experience at work (Miller, 2024), Shrawantika faced discrimination as others pretended to be only male in the position of the head teacher while visiting the educational offices for different meetings. In the starting days of her leadership, community people treated her just as they dominated the women at their home. Similarly, Binika's male counterpart dominated her intellectuality and ability just because she was a woman. In Nepal, the gender of the leader is taken into consideration. Males are typically expected to hold leadership positions determined by societal values or perceptions. Women had to contend with an evaluation of their abilities, gender-based discrimination, and restrictions on their ability to play leadership roles (Subedi & Shrestha, 2023). According to transformational leadership theory, leaders

possess the traits of influential leaders who never give up on their goals. Individuals are often impacted by others, particularly leaders, whom most people look up to and emulate regarding leadership qualities. However, leaders require greater bravery, devotion, and focus for their positions and workplaces (Kapur, 2020). The journey to head teacher was not an easy one for the participants of my study. The role of a good head teacher involves making important decisions, overcoming obstacles, creating a healthy school environment, giving proper guidance to the followers, and having a solid determination. A leader must be courageous and possess good decision-making abilities (Kapur, 2020). They have explained how they overcome the challenges, start, and develop as head teachers. Their journey of struggle and performance as a head teacher presented as the inspiration for their followers.

Moreover, feminist critiques of the idea of female transformational leadership, that the focus on female characteristics may create a narrow set of leadership ideals and behaviors that limit women to only displaying certain transformational behaviors and valuing behaviors associated with women may change our perception of leadership, but it may not necessarily give women an advantage. Similarly, feminist argues that gender rebellion feminists who suggest that rather than focusing on the female advantage and how women can contribute to the existing system, the gender order should be challenged directly by undermining the boundaries between what is defined as "women" and "men," "female" and "male," and "difference (Kark, 2003)."

While it is important to acknowledge the risk of stereotyping female leadership traits, the concept of female transformational leadership does not seek to impose a rigid set of behaviors as per the findings of this study. Instead, it aims to broaden the understanding of effective leadership by recognizing and valuing traditionally feminine traits, such as empathy, collaboration, and inclusiveness traits, that are found in the participants of this study. This inclusive approach encourages diversity in leadership styles, benefiting both men and women. Female transformational leadership emphasizes qualities that are increasingly recognized as crucial in modern leadership, such as emotional intelligence and relational skills. These attributes can contribute to more effective leadership regardless of gender. It acknowledges that women's experiences vary significantly based on factors such as ethnicity, class, religion, age, and gender. It seeks

to expand the definition of effective leadership to include qualities that have been historically undervalued but are essential for addressing complex modern challenges. Women historically have encountered various forms of gender discrimination and stereotypes about their suitable leadership characteristics in their professional lives. Nevertheless, the nature of transformational leadership has similarities with female leadership styles and can include different gender identities (Karmagatri et al., 2020). In the context of Nepal, it is important to understand the struggle and capabilities of women as a headteacher, focusing on inclusivity, effectiveness, and its role in promoting diversity within transformational leadership.

Essence of Chapter

This chapter was created based on this study's second research topic. It is made up of a variety of narratives centered on a women's head teacher's transformative leadership style. In this section, I provided all of my participants' information, observations, efforts, and practice to encourage and urge their followers to accomplish the common goal of the school as a female head teacher. Collectively, their efforts were for their followers' personal and professional growth and development and for creating a healthy learning environment at school. Based on the participants' stories and my observations, I have also discussed the nature of women, which impacted their leadership journey positively and negatively. Meanwhile, I presented their challenges while leading the school as a woman. Similarly, I have shown their stories through two theoretical lenses to make the meaning of shared stories of participants.

CHAPTER VI
INSIGHTS, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter presents a reflection on the process of writing my dissertation, through which I developed knowledge of women and their struggle as a head teacher. Similarly, I have expanded my own experiences as an assistant-head teacher. This study concludes that women struggle to achieve the position of head teacher and their leadership role for the growth and development of followers to achieve the common goal of the school. Further, the implications of the most important new information and thematic area-related explorations are included in this chapter.

Insights from the Study

Based on the study objectives, I covered my participants' stories in chapters IV and V under two distinct themes and sub-themes. Moreover, my participants' experiences inspired me to develop the following insights. The women head teachers as participants of my study shared their stories regarding the challenges they faced on the way to achieving the position of head teacher and the leadership style they followed. I gained insight into how hard they tried to overcome the obstacles, and they feel proud of their success today. To accomplish their life goals, they must have determination and confidence.

Similarly, early in their careers, when they were unsure of their ability to assume leadership duties, women leaders were pushed into leadership positions. Even luck assisted them in seizing numerous possibilities along their leadership journey. Despite their doubts about the leadership journey, they continued their path with strong resolve and devotion.

However, it is also essential to have family and community support. Women struggle to receive equal treatment in every area of society in a patriarchal nation like Nepal. Family support is crucial for women to achieve leadership positions in these circumstances. Due to the support of their families, the women head teachers may be inspired and determined to concentrate on their jobs.

I came to know that there is still prejudice in our society, that roles are still determined by gender, and that women are still expected to exhibit communal qualities like nurturing and personal concern for the unique needs of others. This perception of society has created barriers to women's paths to leadership. Similarly, I realized that women who are successful in fighting for and winning equal opportunity also struggle to maintain a balance between their personal and professional lives. There is a trend that says males should not have to suffer, but women should focus on taking care of children and household duties, regardless of their positions of authority and professional responsibilities. It can be difficult for women to advance in their careers when they must balance work and family. Some people may have to take time off work due to family obligations, making it difficult to focus on their profession.

Similarly, after hearing the opinions of my participants, I was able to form a clear picture of how, despite legal protections against discrimination and for equality, girls and women did not always have the same educational opportunities as boys and men in the early days, which is why there are currently fewer women in leadership positions. However, the practice has changed, and girls are now accepted for equal educational opportunities.

Meanwhile, I realized the advantage of a 33% quota for women in every sector, including education, has allowed for an increase in the participation of women in leadership roles in schools, which is a positive development. This policy encouraged women to be involved in teaching, laying the groundwork for leadership positions. One participant was involved in this profession because of policy and social support.

After learning my participants' stories, I could make sense that the women head teachers, who are my participants, demonstrated their leadership abilities in such a way that they attracted their followers with their leadership style. They have tried to modernize their institutions and unite all the teachers and other staff of their school to achieve the common goal of the school. Each participant had a different ability to lead school, such as encouraging teachers in their personal and professional growth and development, stimulating for creating new ideas, fighting against challenging situations, and being a role model for others. Each participant had a unique capacity for leadership. Despite the various obstacles the leaders faced, they never gave up. Women headteachers

still face challenges, unfairness, and solitary tendencies inside the school and concerned educational offices even though they have transformed themselves and the institutions.

The motherly nature of women headteachers created both a challenge and an opportunity for women to lead the school. However, people appreciate how women lead because they are supportive, encouraging, cooperative, and stimulating for followers' individual and professional growth.

In my journey to becoming a vice-principal in a private school, I knew that having my family's support and mentors would be crucial to my success. My father and sister provided emotional and practical support while I balanced my academics, career, and other responsibilities, which helped me to be organized and motivated. However, in the school environment, as a woman, I struggled to be in an existing position. I am still struggling to reach out for the position of head teacher, which is currently vacant. The chairperson thinks that male head teachers can have stronger personal relationships than female head teachers and are more capable of dealing with disciplinary matters. I found the influence of gender disparity, nepotism, and favoritism in a private organization.

Conclusions

The study tried to investigate the experiences of women head teachers of secondary-level public schools from a transformational standpoint. The participants shared their challenges faced on the journey to be and execute the position of head teacher. The stories of the women in leadership positions proved that there are still many barriers in the way of achieving higher positions and that those in leadership roles also experience discrimination based on gender.

This study explores the experiences and leadership strategies of women headteachers in Nepalese schools, focusing on transformational leadership. The research uses qualitative methods and interpretive paradigms to analyze women's narratives in leadership roles. The study reveals the challenges along with the importance like determination, confidence, family support, dedication to work and educational capabilities in achieving leadership positions. Despite legal protections against discrimination and equality, women still face barriers in leadership positions. The government’s quota for women in education has increased their participation in the leadership roles, but they still face challenges in the school environment, such as

balancing academics, and personal and professional responsibilities. The study also highlights the influence of gender disparity in school settings, which can hinder women's success in leadership positions as head teachers.

The major challenges for women school head teachers are that the negative perceptions regarding gender roles, such as household chores and taking care of children or family and role dilemma. The findings suggests to eliminate the inequality between male and female leadership, which is strongly ingrained in our culture. Even for rights that should come naturally to women, like equal treatment and access to education, they must fight. Because of the low status of women in leadership roles on a personal, social, and professional level, systematic and thoughtful steps must be taken to eliminate obstacles for women to improve their effective participation. I concluded that the academic leadership journey for women is more complex than we realize because they have to balance so many things at once, including their personal, professional, and social issues. It may seem difficult for one person to balance these tasks, but this problem may be resolved if the right tactics are used at the appropriate times.

Support from the family at home, coworkers at work, self-confidence or determination and dedication to work help women to overcome obstacles. Nepal's educational policies also support the inclusion of women in every sector, including the school. With the movement in the nation and governments priority in inclusion, there has been a shift in perceptions of gender roles in the context of Nepal.

Despite the patriarchal framework and traditional mindset, women are rapidly gaining ground in several fields and are even succeeding in breaking them down. The women leaders have upheld their dedication and determination to overcome obstacles and balance their personal and professional lives. Which become the milestone for those women teachers who make decisions of leadership roles and opportunities. From the study above, I learned women head teachers can effectively handle the role of head teacher since they deservingly reached the position. Women head teachers improve the academic environment and become the coworkers' role model in personal and professional life.

Implications

I believe this study has significant implications for many stakeholders in the education field, particularly for women school head teachers, women interested in becoming head teachers, policymakers, and future researchers.

Implications for Women School Head Teachers

The status of women's participation in the educational setting, as well as their ability to improve the educational environment and followers' abilities in the personal, social, and professional contexts, were studied in this research. Based on the findings of this study, if women become role models in the post of head teacher, they aspire other women to leadership positions, which ultimately leads to increasing women's participation in educational leadership. Women head teachers can make efforts to increase women's involvement in the academic field and apply the various approaches of transformational leadership employed by other accomplished women head teachers.

Implications for Future Women School Head Teachers

The study findings provide information on present practices and future opportunities for women to lead in schools to support female head teachers and school leaders who wish to pursue leadership roles. It inspires upcoming school head teachers to get involved and positively impact the education sector. Young women who wish to dive into this profession and become leaders in the education sector will also find the research beneficial. Similarly, this study is helpful to women assistant head teachers/vice principals and school administrators in identifying approaches to overcome challenges in their personal and professional lives. The study aids women head teachers in understanding the difficulties they confront and how to overcome them, which supports women in particular while they confront life's challenges.

Implications for Educational Policy Makers

This study showed that socio-cultural practices cause a gap between policy provisions and practices. The current policy's requirements for including women in school leadership roles are insufficient to guarantee women's meaningful involvement. Nepal's policy promotes the inclusion of women, and some women are also considered beneficial. However, the policy is still not being followed practically to the fullest. Women need a real and proper environment to increase their effective participation in

educational leadership. Therefore, policymakers can review policies, plans, programs, and control mechanisms using the knowledge gathered from this research. In the current context, policymakers include various educational agencies and the municipal, provincial, and federal governments. It would be better for the Nepal government to create initiatives that empower women and encourage participation in addressing the gap between policy provision and practices.

Similarly, the report highlights sociocultural norms and beliefs that impose more importance on a woman's family than her profession. By boosting representation and providing opportunities for women in leadership roles, policymakers could think about programs that make our society treat women equally and help increase women's self-confidence so that they can contribute equally to the education sector. Policymakers can utilize this report as a valuable tool to empower women and advance gender equality in education.

Implication for Leadership Development

The findings and insights of the study presented a clear picture of the transformative leadership qualities that head teachers of schools possess. It supports aspiring school leaders in becoming successful head teachers and positively impacting the education sector. Through an analysis of the many roles head teachers can play along their leadership journey and develop their leadership. This research offered a reference for future head teachers to learn more about the transformational leadership traits of head teachers.

Implication for Future Researchers

This study offers a valuable starting point for future research into women headteachers' difficulties and their transformational leadership style in Nepal's public education system. The emphasis on the viewpoints of women school head teachers highlights their distinct experiences with barriers to becoming leaders and gender inequality in their leadership roles. By including the viewpoints of additional vital stakeholders, such as female teachers, leaders, and higher-level school workers, future researchers could build on this work. It could provide a more thorough understanding of the experiences of women head teachers and their leadership approach in Nepal's education sector.

REFERENCES

Asian Development Bank [ADB] (2016). *Gender equality results case study: Nepal-gender equality and empowerment of women project.* http://www.adb.org/publications/gender-equality-results-case-study-nepal

Adhikari, D. P. (2024). Head teacher's self-efficacy with transforming leadership for changing school: The efforts, *Journal of Education & Research*, 5(*1*), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.3126/ejer.v5i1.65628

Adhikari, R., & Adhikari, D. (2021). Women participation in school governance in Lalitpur, Nepal: A participatory development practice. *Nepalese Journal of Development and Rural Studies, 18 (1),* 24-35. https://doi.org/10.3126/njdrs.v18i01.41946

Al-Jaradat, M.K.M (2014). Challenges facing women academic leadership in secondary schools of Irbid educational area, Canadian center of science and education. *International Education Studies; 7(*5), 147-160 http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ies.v7n5p147

Ansari, M.A. (2023). Liberal feminism. *International Journal of Engineering, Management and Humanities (IJEMH) 4* (1), 126-128. www.ijemh.com

Archard, N. (2012). Developing future women leaders: The importance of mentoring and role modeling in the girls' school context. *Mentoring a Tutoring: Partnership in Learning 20*(4), 451–472. https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2012.725980

Arifin, S. R. M. (2018). Ethical considerations in qualitative study. *International Journal of Care Scholars*, *1*(2), 30-33.

Asian Development Bank. (2010). *Overview of gender equality and social inclusion in Nepal*. https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/32237/cga-nep-2010.pdf

Asuako, J (2020). *Women's participation in decision making: Why it matters*. UNDP. https://www.undp.org/ghana/news/womens-participation-decision-making-why-it-matters

Avolio, B. J., & Bass, B. M. (1995). Individual consideration viewed at multiple levels of analysis: A multi-level framework for examining the diffusion of transformational leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *6*(2), 199-218. https://doi.org/10.1016/1048-9843(95)90035-7

Avolio, B. J., Bass, B. M., & Jung, D. I. (1999). Re-examining the components of transformational and transactional leadership using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 72*(4), 441–462. https://doi.org/10.1348/096317999166789

Bailey, L. E. (2016). Feminism, liberal. *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies*, 1-3. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118663219.wbegss738

Banerji, P., & Krishnan, V. R. (2000). Ethical preferences of transformational leaders: An empirical investigation. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, *21*(8), 405-413. https://doi.org/10.1108/01437730010358161

Bass, B. M. (1998). *Transformational leadership: Industrial, military, and educational impact.* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2017). *Transformational leadership.* Psychology Press

Bass, B. M., Avolio, B. J., & Atwater, L. (1996). The transformational and transactional leadership of men and women. *Applied Psychology*, *45*(1), 5-34. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1996.tb00847.x

Bass, B.M and Riggio, R.E (2006). *Transformational leadership*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers

Bayir, T. K., & Donmez, A. (2020). Being a women school principal in Turkey. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, *26*(1), 163- 202. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1266713.pdf

Beasley, C. (1999). *What is feminism? an introduction to feminist theory.* SAGE Publications.

Bell, E. E. (2017). A narrative inquiry: A black male looking to teach. *The Qualitative Report*, *22*(4), 1137-1150. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2017.2650

Bernassconi, F.Y., (2019). *Determination is key to successful leaders.* PennState. https://sites.psu.edu/leadership/author/fmb5169/

Bhatti, A., & Ali, R. (2021). Women constructing leadership identities in academia: intersection of gender and culture. *Issues in Educational Research, 31*(1).

Bilal, A., Ahmad , W., Jan, M.F., Huseynov, R., &Nagy, H. (2021). *How women's transformational leadership induces employees' innovative behaviour through trust and connectivity: A sequential mediation model.* Sage Publication.

Blackmore J. & Judyth S. (2007). *Performing and reforming leader-gender educating restructuring and organizational change.* State University of New York Press.

Blackmore, J. (1999). Troubling women: Feminism, leadership and educational change. *Open University Press*

Börü, N. (2020). Ethical dilemmas: A problematic situation for teachers. *International Journal of Progressive Education, 16*(3), 1-17.

Brinkmann, J. L., Cash, C., & Price, T. (2021). Crisis leadership and coaching: A tool for building school leaders' self-efficacy through self-awareness and reflection. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 10(*2*), 234-246. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-01-02021-0009

Bunaiyan, W., & McWilliams, K. (2018). A review of the transformational leadership. *International Journal of Education, Learning, and Development, 6*(1), 1-5.

Burns, J.M. (1978). *Leadership*. Harper & Row.

Bush, T. (2009). Leadership development and school improvement: Contemporary issues in leadership development. *Educational Review*, *61*(4), 375-389.

Bush, T., & Middlewood, D. (2013). *Leading and managing people in education.* Sage Publications Ltd.

Butler Jr, J. K., Cantrell, R. S., & Flick, R. J. (1999). Transformation leadership behaviors, upward trust, and satisfaction in self-managed work teams. *Organization Development Journal*, *17*(1), 13-28. https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1999-10444-001

Central Bureau of Statistics (2021). *National census.* Government of Nepal. https://censusnepal.cbs.gov.np.

Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011 (2012). *Secretarial national population and housing census*. Government of Nepal. www.old.cbs.gov.np

Cech, E. A., & Blair-Loy, M. (2010). Perceiving glass ceilings? Meritocratic versus structural explanations of gender inequality among women in science and technology. *Social Problems, 57*(3), 371-397. https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2010.57.3.371

Clandinin D. J (2006). Narrative inquiry: a methodology for studying lived experience, *Sage Publication.* https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1321103X060270010301

Clandinin D. J., Pushor D., Orr A. M. (2007). Navigating sites for narrative inquiry. *Journal of Teacher Education, 58*(1), 21–35. https://journals.sagepub.com

Clandinin, D. J, Caine, V., Lessard, S., & Huber, J. (2016). Engaging in narrative inquiries with children and youth. *Routledge*. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315545370

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2004). Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research. *John Wiley and Sons*.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2017). Action research. In *Research methods in education* (pp. 440–456). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315456539-22

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (6th ed.). Routledge. https://islmblogblog.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/rme-edu-helpline-blogspot-com.pdf

Coleman, M. (2003). Gender in educational leadership. *Leadership in education*, 36-51.

Constitution of Nepal (2072). *Nepal government*.

Corner, L. (1997, May). Women's participation in decision-making and leadership: A global perspective. In *A paper presented at a conference on Women in Decision-making in Cooperative held by the Asian Women in Cooperative Development Forum (ACWF) and the International Cooperative Alliance Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ICAROAP).*

Peace Corps (2020). *Global issues: Gender equality and women's empowerment.* https://www.peacecorps.gov/educators-and-students/educators/resources/global-issues-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment/

Creswell, J. W. (2009). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. *Sage Publications*.

Cunliffe, A. L., Luhman, J. T., & Boje, D. M. (2004). Narrative temporality: Implications for organizational research. *Organization Studies, 25*(2), 261-286. https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406040400

Dahal, B. P. (2014). *Child participation in schools of Nepal: Role and contribution of child clubs* [Doctoral Thesis]. Kathmandu University.

Dalal, N. (2015). Liberal feminist perspective in education. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research, 4*(1), 2-27. https://elibrary.ku.edu.np/handle/20.500.14301/257

Darling-Hammond, L., Wechsler, M. E., Levin, S., & Tozer, S. (2022). *Developing effective principals: What kind of learning matters?* Learning Policy Institute. Wallace. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/developing-effective-principals-report

Dinsdale, R. (2017). The role of leaders in developing a positive culture. *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education, 9*(1), 42-45. http://doi: 10.1177/1321103X060270010301

Dunshea, G. (1998). Beginning principals and the issue of gender in rural and regional areas. *Asia Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 26(3), 203-216. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866980260304

Dwivedi, R. (2021). Authentic leadership- A challenge for women leaders in India. *International Journal of Research in all Subjects in Multi Languages, 6*(3), 88-92. https://www.raijmr.com/ijrsml/wp content/uploads/2018/05/IJRSML_2018_vol06_Sp_issue_3_24.pdf

Eagly, A. H. (2013). *Sex differences in social behavior: A social-role interpretation*. Psychology Press. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203781906

Eagly, A. H., & Johannesen-Schmidt, M. C. (2001). The leadership styles of women and men. *Journal of Social Issues, 57*(4), 781-797. https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00241

Eagly, A. H., Carli, L. L., & Carli, L. L. (2007). *Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders*. Harvard Business School Press.

Eagly, A. H., Johannesen-Schmidt, M. C., & Van Engen, M. L. (2003). Transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles: a meta-analysis comparing women and men. *Psychological Bulletin, 129*(4), 569. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.4.569

Eakle, S. A. (1995). Going where few women have gone. *Thrust for Educational Leadership, 24*(6), 16-21. www.wpnet.com/cgi-bin/epwtop

EFA 2002-2015 (2003). *Nepal national commission for UNESCO in collaboration with UNESCO.*

Effiong, A., & Inyang, S. (2020). *A brief history and classification of feminism.* [Unpublished dissertation]. University of Calabar.

Elmuti, D., Jia, H., & Davis, H. H. (2009). Challenges women face in leadership positions and organizational effectiveness: An investigation. *Journal of Leadership Education, 8*(2), 167-187.

Enyew, B. E., & Mihrete, A. G. (2018). Liberal feminism: Assessing its compatibility and applicability in Ethiopia context. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology, 10*(6), 59-64. https://doi.org/10.5897/IJSA2018.0769

Febriantina, S. (2016). Outstanding female leadership in implementing effective school. *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Educational, Management, Administration and Leadership.* https://www.atlantis-press.com/proceedings/icemal-16/25867371

Fisher, Y. (2020). Self-efficacy of school principals. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. http:// doi: 10.1093/ acrefore/9780190264093.013.910

Fleming, J., & Zegwaard, K. E. (2018). Methodologies, methods and ethical considerations for conducting research in work-integrated learning. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning, 19*(3), 205-213. https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencespapers?referenceid=3072118

Ghimire, Surendra. (2022). Head teachers' transformational leadership styles in community schools of Lalitpur district. *The Batuk, 8*(1), 48-62. https://doi.org/10.3126/batuk.v8i1.43506.

Giddens, A. (2001). *Sociology*. Polity Press. https://books.google.com/books/about/Sociology.html?id=D4I8PgAACAAJ

Government of Nepal. (2074). *Nepal labour act 2074.*

Government of Nepal. (2018). *Nepal law commission 2018*. www.lawcommission.gov.np

Government of Nepal. (2011). *National census 2011*. www.nepalcensus-2011

Government of Nepal. (2021). *National census 2021*.

Gmelch, W. H., & Wolverton, M. (2002). *College deans: Leading from within*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. https://rowman.com/ISBN/9780313077449/College-Deans-Leading-from-Within

Goeller, K. A. (1995). Principal leadership: The female component. *NASSP Bulletin, 79*(568), 105-116. https://doi.org/10.1177/019263659507956819

Gupton, S. L. (2009). Women in educational leadership in the US: Reflections of a 50-year veteran. *Forum on Public Policy Online: Oxford Round Table.* https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:150818796}

Gurr, D., & Drysdale, L. (2020). Leadership for challenging times. *International Studies in Educational Administration, 48*(1), 24-30. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342915017_Leadership_for_challenging_times

Gurung, O. (2009). Social inclusion: Policies and practices in Nepal. *Occasional papers in Sociology and Anthropology, 11*, 1-15. https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/OPSA/article/view/3027

Hacifazlioglu, O. (2010). Entry and transition to academic leadership: Experiences of women leaders from Turkey and the US. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, *10*(4), 2257-2273. https://www.ajol.info/index.php/pie/article/view/76916/67392

Hanaysha, J. R., Khalid, K., Mat, N. K., Sarassina, F., Rahman, M. Y., & Zakaria, A. S. (2012). Transformational leadership and job satisfaction. *American Journal of Economics, 2*(4), 145-148. http://dx.doi.org/10.5923/j.economics.20120001.32

Heiss, K. (2023). *Introduction to leadership*. Rakuten Kobo. https://www.kobo.com/ww/en/ebook/introduction-to-leadership-8

Helterbran, V. R., & Rieg, S. A. (2004). *Women as school principals: What is the challenge?* UNL Digital Commons.

Herouach, S. (2019). Liberal feminism impact on Moroccan educated women: Faculty of letters and human sciences, FLDM, as a field study. *Open Political Science*, *2*(1), 128-152. https://doi.org/10.1515/openps-2019-0014

Howe-Walsh, L., & Turnbull, S. (2016). Barriers to women leaders in academia: tales from science and technology. *Studies in Higher Education*, *41*(3), 415-428. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.929102

Huang, Z. (2020). The Role Dilemma and solution strategy of female leadership development in colleges and universities from the perspective of gender mainstreaming. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, *8*(02), 109. https**://**doi.org/ 10.4236/jss.2020.82010

Ismail, A., Ahmad, N. S., Amzah, F., & Aman, R. C. (2021). Female transformational leadership and teachers' commitment: Mediating effect of perceived organizational politics. *International Journal of Business and Society*, *22*(2), 591-606.

Jackson-Dunn, J. D. (2018). *African American women principal's perceptions of challenges faced in obtaining and maintaining principal leadership*. The University of Memphis. https://digitalcommons.memphis.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3016&context=etd

Jain, S. (2020). The rising fourth wave: Feminist activism on digital platforms in India. *ORF Issue Brief*, *384*, 1-16. https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencespapers?referenceid=3763903

Jogulu, U. D., & Wood, G. J. (2006). The role of leadership theory in raising the profile of women in management. *Equal Opportunities International*, *25*(4), 236-250. https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/02610150610706230/full/pdf

Johns, M. L. (2013). Breaking the glass ceiling: Structural, cultural, and organizational barriers preventing women from achieving senior and executive positions. *Perspectives in Health Information Management (Online)*, *10*. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3544145/

Kapur, R. (2018). Representation of women in school leadership positions in India. *Research Gate.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323834115_Representation_of_Women_in_School_Leadership_Positions_in_India

Kapur, R. (2020). Leadership skills: Crucial in emerging into ethical leaders. *Research Gate.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343682876_Leadership_Skills_Crucial_in_Emerging_into_Ethical_Leaders

Karimi, K. (2010). A brief introduction to temporality and causality. *Research Gate.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/45929267_A_Brief_Introduction_to_Temporality_and_Causality#:~:text=The%20topic%20is%20then%20divided,of%20certain%20events%20on%20others.

Kark, R. (2003). The transformational leaders: who is (she) he? A feminist perspective. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*. Doi:10.1108/09534810410530593

Kark, R. (2004). The transformational leader: Who is (s) he? A feminist perspective. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, *17*(2), 160-176.

Karmagatri, M., Kurnianingrum, D., & Alamsyan, D.P. (2020). Transformational leadership theory in gender perspective. *Test Engineering and Management*, *83*, 28795 – 28800. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369881712

Khatri, H. B. (2022). Girls education in Nepal: History, challenging factors and promoting factors. *HISAN: Journal of History Association of Nepal*, *8*(1), 43-50.

Killam, L. (2013). *Research terminology simplified: Paradigms, axiology, ontology, epistemology and methodology*. Laura Killam.

Kivunja, C., & Kuyini, A. B. (2017). Understanding and applying research paradigms in educational contexts. *International Journal of higher education*, *6*(5), 26-41. http://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v6n5p26

Komiti, M., & Moorosi, P. (2020). Career development of women principals in Lesotho: Influences, opportunities and challenges. *Journal of Education*, (79), 95-114. http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2520-9868/i79a07

Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice*, *24*(1), 120-124. https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2023). *The leadership challenge workbook*. John Wiley & Sons.

Ladkin, D. (2010). *Rethinking leadership: A new look at old leadership questions*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Lalitpur Metropolitan City (2078/79). *Education bulletin.*

Lease, S. H. (2003). Testing a model of men's nontraditional occupational choices. *The Career Development Quarterly*, *51*(3), 244-258.

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2005). A review of transformational school leadership research 1996–2005. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *4*(3), 177-199.

Lorber, J. (2001). *Gender inequality: Feminist theories and politics.* Roxbury Pub. https://search.worldcat.org/title/Gender-inequality-:-feminist-theories-and-politics/oclc/43885444

Lorber, J. (2010). *Gender inequality: Feminist theories and politics*. Oxford University Press.

Lyons, G. (1996). *The competent head: A job analysis of heads' tasks and personality factors*. Taylor & Francis.

Mahat, D., & Aithal, P. S. (2022). Socio-culture and women career development: references to government agencies of Nepal. *International Journal of Management, Technology, and Social Sciences (IJMTS), 7*(2). https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7041469

Mandell, B., & Pherwani, S. (2003). Relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership style: A gender comparison. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, *17*, 387-404.

Mannathoko, C. E. (1992). *Feminist theories and the study of gender issues in Southern Africa.* Africa.Org. *https://www.africabib.org/rec.php?RID=W00084027*

Martin, J. L. (2011). *Women as leaders in education: Succeeding despite inequity, discrimination, and other challenges*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Sage Publications.

Miller, A. L. (2024). Intersectionality in US educational research: Visibilizing the historically excluded and under-recognized experiences of disabled girls of color. *Educational Review*, *76*(1), 166-180. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2022.2163377

Ministry of Education [MoE]. (2016). *School sector development plan, Nepal, 2016/17-2022/23.*

Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2018). *Flash report 2075, (2018/19).* https://www.doe.gov.np/assets/uploads/files/cbe2b2b1ae68bb5bdaa93299343e5c28.pdf

Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. (2021). *Flash report 2078, (2021/22).* https://www.doe.gov.np

Ministry of Education Science and Technology. (2019). *National education policy, (2019).* Government of Nepal. www.gov.np

Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. (2022). *School education sector plan, (2022/23-2032/33).* Government of Nepal. https://www.doe.gov.np

Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration. (2074). *Roles and responsibilities of headteacher*.

Moorhead, G., & Griffin, R. W. (2008). *Organizational behavior managing people and organizations*. Dreamtech Press.

Morley, L., & Crossouard, B. (2015). *Women in higher education leadership in South Asia: Rejection, refusal, reluctance, revisioning.* British Council.

Morley, L., & Crossouard, B. (2016). Gender in the neoliberalised global academy: the affective economy of women and leadership in South Asia. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *37*(1), 149-168.

Msila, V. (2013). Obstacles and opportunities in women school leadership: A literature study. *International Journal of Educational Sciences*, *5*(4), 463-470. doi:10.1080/09751122.2013.11890108

Mukul, M. (2022). Liberal feminism. *iPleders Blog*. https://blog.ipleaders.in/liberal-feminism/

Ndlovu, T. P., & Gerwel Proches, C. N. (2019). Leadership challenges facing female school principal in the Durban INK area. *Gender and Behaviour*, *17*(2), 12859-12871.

Nijat, A., & Murtazashvili, J. B. (2015). *Women's leadership roles in Afghanistan*. United States Institute of Peace.

O'Brien, K., & Allin, L. (2022). Transformational learning through a women's outdoor leadership course. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, *22*(2), 191-202. https://doi.org/ 10.1080/14729679.2021.1925565

OECD (2013). *Education at a Glance 2016: OECD indicators.* OECE Publication

Ogola, M., Sikalieh, D. & Linge, T. K. (2017). The influence of individualized consideration leadership behavior on employee performance in small and medium enterprises in Kenya. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, *8*(2), 163-173.

Olsson, M., & Martiny, S. E. (2018). Does exposure to counter stereotypical role models influence girls' and women's gender stereotypes and career choices? A review of social psychological research. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *9*, 392862.

Oplatka, I., & Hertz-Lazarowitz, R. (Eds.). (2006). *Women principals in a multicultural society: New insights into feminist educational leadership*. Sense Publishers.

Oxley, J. C. (2011). Liberal feminism. In M. Bruce & S. Barbone *Just the arguments: 100 of the most important arguments in western philosophy*, (pp.258-262). Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Palys, T. (2008). Purposive sampling. *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, *2*(1), 697-8.

Peeke, G. (2003). Leadership in further education. In M. Brundrettt, N. Burton & R. Smith, *Leadership in education*, (pp.164-180). Sage Publication.

Perets, S., Davidovich, N., & Lewin, E. (2023). Perceptions of leadership, self-confidence and leadership programs among teenage girls in Israel. *Cogent Education*, *10*(1), 2195742.

Pokhrel, P. (2020). *Women at the decision-making level in Nepalese civil service: Impacts of culture.* [Unpublished dissertation]. North South University.

https://www.northsouth.edu/newassets/images/mppg/9.%20Puja%20Pokhrel%20Final%20Thesis.pdf

Poudel, M. (2022). Gendering the state: Opportunities, challenges, and lessons. *Rooting Nepal's Democratic Spirit*, 107.

Powell, G. N. (1990). One more time: Do female and male managers differ? *Executive (Ada, Ohio)*, *4*(3), 68-75.

Pradeepa, S. (2023). Why is self-confidence important to success? *Believe in Mind.* https://www.believeinmind.com/self-growth/why-is-self-confidence-important-to-success/

Radu, C., Deaconu, A., & Frasineanu, C. (2017). Leadership and gender differences: Are men and women leading in the same way. *Contemporary Leadership Challenges*, *63*. http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/65774

Ray, M. (May, 7, 2020). *Transformational leadership: Intellectual stimulation*. https://www.michelleray.com/transformational-leadership-intellectual-stimulation/

Reeves, S., Albert, M., Kuper, A., & Hodges, B. D. (2008). Why use theories in qualitative research? *Bmj*, *337*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.a949

Robin, J., Ibarra, H., & Kolb, D. (2011). Taking gender into account: Theory and design for women's leadership development programs. *Academy of Management Learning & Education.* https://flora.insead.edu/fichiersti_wp/inseadwp2011/2011-69.pdf

Rosemarie T. (1989). *Feminist thought: A comprehensive introduction*. Routledge.

Rowen, D. (2019). The fourth wave: Feminism and its legacies. *On Dit Magazine. https://onditmagazine.medium.com/the-fourth-wave-feminism-and-its-legacies-81b0af224267#:~:text=Artwork%20by%20Emily%20Savage.,complexity%20and%20crucial%20historical%20relevancy.*

Sandhu, K. Y., & Ahmed, Q. (2018). Role of family support technical training in women empowerment. *Latest Trends Text. Fash*, *3*, 280-285. https://doi.org./10.32474/LTTFD.2018.03.000153

Saqib, M. A. (2016, February 3). *Types of feminism.* https://www.slideshare.net/saqibjanjua/types-of-feminism

Seitchik, M. (2020). Confidence and gender: Few differences, but gender stereotypes impact perceptions of confidence. *The Psychologist-Manager Journal, 23*(3-4), 194.

Shakeshaft, C. (1989). *Women in educational administration*. Sage Publications.

Sharif, K. (2019). Transformational leadership behaviors of women in a socially dynamic environment. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis, 27*(4), 1191-1217. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-12-2018-1611

Sharma, M. (2019). Applying feminist theory to medical education. *The Lancet*, *393*(10171), 570-578. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)32595-9

Shepherd, S. (2017). Why are there so few female leaders in higher education: A case of structure or agency? *Management in Education, 31*(2), 82-87. https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020617696631

Shrestha, A., & Gartoulla, R. P. (2015). Socio-cultural causes of gender disparity in Nepalese society. *Journal of Advanced Academic Research, 2*(1), 100-111. https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/JAAR/article/view/16601

Shrestha, M. (2020). Transformational leadership and its dimensions: Contributions in organizational change among schools. *BSSS: Journal of Management, 11*(10), 112-131.

Silva, S. & Mendis, K. (2017). Male vs female leaders: Analysis of transformational, transactional & laissez-fair women leadership styles. *European Journal of Business and Management, 9*(9). 19-26.

Smith, R. (2002). The role of the university head of department: A survey of two British universities. *Educational Management & Administration, 30*(3), 293-312. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263211X020303004

Soklaridis, S., Kuper, A., Whitehead, C. R., Ferguson, G., Taylor, V. H., & Zahn, C. (2017). Gender bias in hospital leadership: a qualitative study on the experiences of women CEOs. *Journal of Health Organization and Management, 31*(2), 253-268. https://doi.org/10.1108/JHOM-12-2016-0243

Southworth, G. (2002). Instructional leadership in schools: Reflections and empirical evidence. *School Leadership & Management, 22*(1), 73-91. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430220143042

Subedi, R., & Shrestha, M. (2023). From fighting to flying: Women leadership in private schools of Kathmandu valley. *KMC Journal*, *5*(1), 281-300. https://doi.org/10.3126/kmcj.v5i1.52467

Subramanian, R. B., Irudayaraj, I. S. F., & SJ, S. G. (2015). Women leadership in organization. *Editorial Team Editorial Advisory Board*, 15.

Taylor, P. & Medina M. (2013). Educational research paradigm: From positivism to multi pragmatism. *Journal for Meaning Centered Education.* DOI:10.13140/2.1.3542.0805

Taylor, P. C., & Medina, M. (2011). Educational research paradigms: From positivism to pluralism. *College Research Journal*, *1*(1), 1-16.

The Kathmandu Post, (20 June 2020). *Renowned educationist and social worker Angur Baba Joshi passes away at 89.*

Tong, R. (2018). *Feminist thought: A more comprehensive introduction*. Routledge.

Trinidad, C., & Normore, A. H. (2005). Leadership and gender: a dangerous liaison?. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, *26*(7), 574-590.

UN Women Report (2018-2019). *Annual report, UN women.*

UNICEF (2022). *Increasing women's representation in school leadership a promising path towards improving learning.*

United Nations, (1996). *Report of the fourth world conference of women.* United Nations Publication.

University Grants Commission (UGC), (2018/19). *Education management information system*: *Report on higher education 2018/19*.

University Grants Commission (UGC), (2019/20). *Education management information system*: *Report on higher education 2019/20*. https://www.ugcnepal.edu.np/uploads/publicationsAndReports/whSE4t.pdf

Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership (2023). *Female representation in school leadership*. https://www.academy.vic.gov.au

Walby, S. (2011).*The future of feminism.* Polity Press.

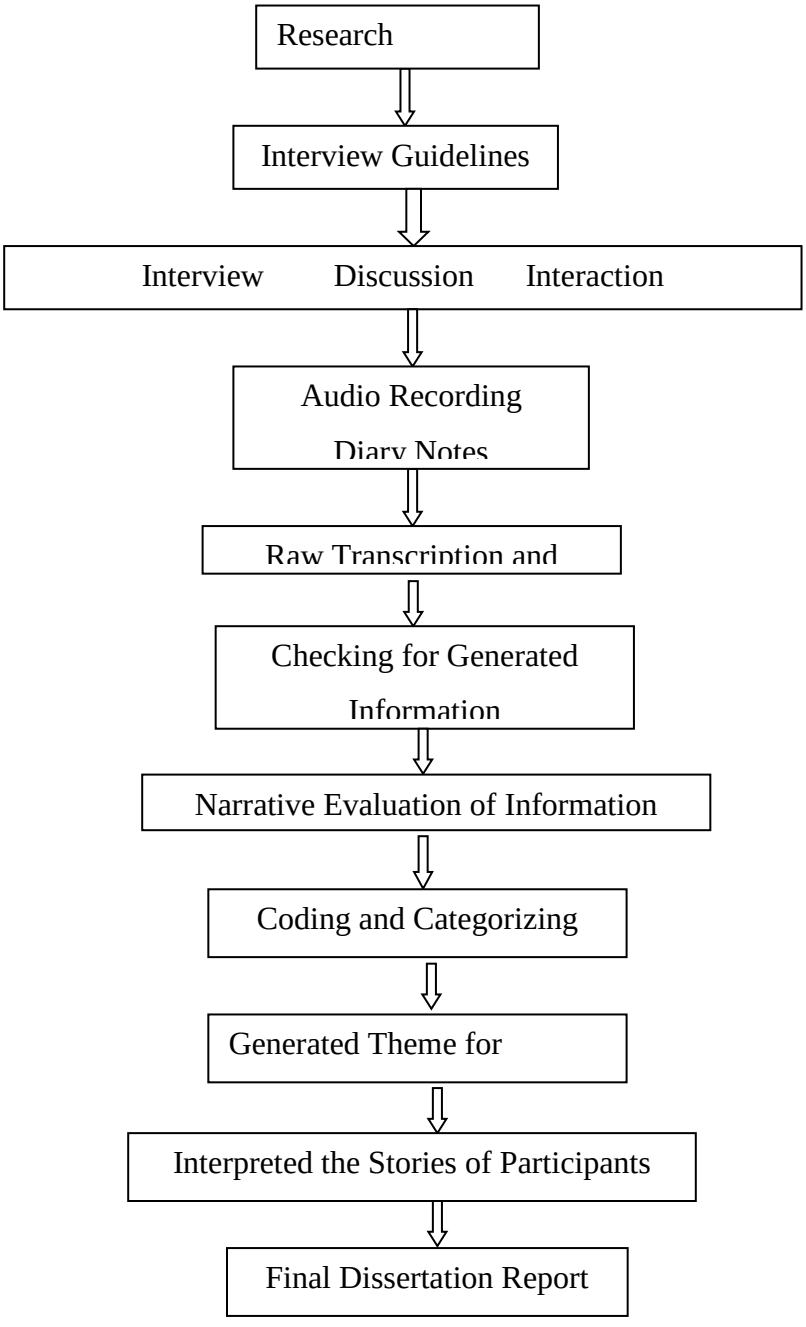
Wellington, S., Kropf, M. B., & Gerkovich, P. R. (2003). What's holding women back?. *Harvard Business Review*, *81*(6), 18-18. www.fofald.gov.np

Zenger, J & Folkman, J. (2012). *Are women better leaders than man?* Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2012/03/a-*study-in-leadership-women-do*.

ANNEXES

Annex – I

Field Plan to Generate Information



Annex-II

Interview Guideline

Research Topic

Exploring Stories of Women Head Teachers in Schools: Transformational Leadership Perspective

Purpose of the Study

This research explores the stories of women head teachers in their professional, social, and individual contexts. In doing so, the focus will be placed on transformational leadership.

Research Questions

A. How do women head teachers experience professional, social, and individual challenges in becoming head teachers?
B. How do women head teachers effectively practice basic dimensions of transformational leadership in their professional, social, and individual contexts?

Interview Guiding Questions based on Research Question

Guiding questions to explore the experiences of women headteachers in the personal, professional, and social context

1. A brief introduction, please?
2. What inspired you to choose a career in the education sector?
3. Will you please share your success story regarding your leadership position?
4. How do you narrate your struggle as a women head teacher to hold this position?
5. Would you please share the worst situation you experienced as a head teacher?
6. If yes, how did you resolve these difficulties?
7. While leading this institution as a women's head teacher, how do you feel about the support of your team and subordinates?

8. How do you balance your personal and professional life? Moreover, what about your family's support in getting you to this point?
9. Have you ever experienced a biological barrier to your success? Please shed some light on this subject.
10. In the Nepalese context, how do you view the role of women in leadership?
11. Many people in our society are empowering themselves as we move into the twenty-first century. What do you think about whether society is prepared to accept women's leadership in this regard?
12. Please share your thoughts and observations about the underrepresentation of women's leadership in secondary schools.

Guiding Questions related to the leadership style of women head teachers

1. As a woman leader, how have you been managing the school? Would you please share?
2. How do you help to improve organizational performance and empower your employee, which positively influence them and take you as a role model?
3. How do you motivate your staff to achieve the organizational goal?
4. How do you organize your team to develop a shared vision?
5. Can you give an example of an event when you led a change in your school with your leadership style?
6. Have you ever encountered disparity based on gender in your workplace? How did you overcome with this?
7. What is your experience and observation about the difference between female and male leadership?
8. As per your experience, what differences did you find between male and female teachers regarding their personal and professional responsibilities?

9. Where do you find yourself in your family and community before and after holding the leadership position?
10. What guidance would you offer other women aspiring to leadership positions in education?
11. What transformation do you notice in yourself due to achieving this position?
12. What do you wish you knew before beginning your career as a school head teacher?

Annex-III

Letter for Field Work from Kathmandu University

Kathmandu University
School of Education

School of Education

09 May 2023

To Whom It May Concern

Ms. Anu Khadka has been studying MPhil in Education with a specialization in Educational Leadership at the School of Education of this University since February 2020. For the completion of her MPhil Dissertation, she is conducting research on " EXPLORING STORIES OF WOMEN PRINCIPALS IN SCHOOLS: TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE"

In course of her research, she is currently visiting different places where she needs to consult libraries, research centers, educational consultancies, related government, and non-government organizations, colleges & schools. She is collecting data for her research from educationists, policy makers, development activist and educational administrators.

Therefore, I would like to request the concerned organizations and personalities to co-operate her on her research activities.

Asst. Prof. Shesha Kanta Pangeni, PhD
Acting Head of Department
Department of Educational Leadership

Annex-IV

Transcribe Sample of Women Head Teacher's Personal, Social and Professional Experience

Participant-1 (Ansika)

A brief introduction of the participant

Name ……., 56 years old and working as a head teacher since 2068, but it has been 40 years since she has worked as a teacher.

Interviewer:- What inspired you to choose a career in education?

Interviewee:- Umm, honestly speaking, actually, there was a policy where one female teacher was compulsory at the primary level, and at the same time, I was only the female candidate who passed the S.L.C. in our locality, so I was offered the position. In this way, I entered the teaching profession. I never thought of being a teacher but… ha.. ha but I became a teacher.

Interviewer: So you never thought of being a teacher?

Interviewee:- Initially, I thought no one was in our locality. During that time, our society had no trend of teaching daughters. So I never thought to be passed in S.L.C even in my dream. Moreover, I thought of following a profession in which to live. So, while studying in school, I chose the topic of sewing/tailoring (Silai Bunai) as the home science subject. I could live by sewing my village clothes if I learned tailoring skills. I never thought of getting a job after passing S.L.C. I thought I would earn money to survive by learning the tailoring skill.

However, by chance, I passed S.L.C. During our time, results used to be published only in "Gorkha Patra." There was no other medium to learn about the results like these days. One of my friends went to have Gorkha Patra, but he took the time to bring that paper. I was impatient till I got the result..he..he.. my friend, who had gone to have the paper, was busy watching a movie.. he had gone in the morning and returned in the evening he..he.. and here I was so panicked. I even did not have a meal.. I could not concentrate on anything. However, when I got the passing result, it was unexpected. However, I did not think of teaching or having a job. However, let us say I got an

opportunity to teach through my fortune, love, support, and hard work. Since 2041 Shrawan 5, I have been teaching here.

Interviewer:- How is your experience about family support after getting married?

Interviewee: Handling the position would not have been possible without family support. The support of my mother-in-law is especially appreciated. After completing an intermediate level, I married but was still determined to study for a bachelor's degree. I continued my bachelor's level since my baby was so small. If I had the support of my husband and mother-in-law, then it was not possible to continue my studies. Aba dukheso kati pokhnu? Ha..ha..ha..

Despite the family support, I have struggled hard. Everyone supported me to be the head teacher, but if there would be a man, they would be free of all these personal responsibilities and biased perceptions. We thank everyone, and people in society think that getting support from a husband is a big gift, but why is it not implicated in the case of men? Why do people not say that his wife is so supportive that she cooks for his family?

A Sample of Women Head Teacher's Leadership Style

Participant-3 (Shrawantika)

Interviewer:- Ma'am, have you ever suffered with your leadership style?

Interviewee:- Actually, what I have observed is people are by nature like "*Aulo dida dudulko nilne*" *ha.. ha.. ha*..such as if someone needed to go home, I quickly let them go and then the next day another ask for going. If I allowed them to go quickly, then school would suffer. Therefore, I have learned a lesson: We have to be strict, even though we don't want to be strict.

Interviewer:- How do you help to improve organizational performance and empower your employees?

Interviewee: As per my understanding, I found that it is better to suggest outside people rather than me so that I can coordinate with NGOs and other different organizations and conduct the training with their help**. We** make plans for practical classes. Sometimes what happened " Bancharo lai pani hani rakhdakheri bodo hunchha tesaile bela bela ma arjapnu parchha bhaninchha ni" *that is why sometimes I organize some motivational training, refreshment training and also I send our teachers*

compulsorily for different trainings invited by any medium, government or different organization.

Interviewer:- What transformation do you notice in yourself due to achieving this position?

Interviewee:- "*Aakash jamin ko farak" !* A*s I have already said, I used to think of myself as very knowledgeable, but after holding this position, I feel there is a lot to learn*; I feel totally…ha..ha..ha.., what I am observing is.. *I cannot change students' behavior; instead of all my efforts, many students fail in math subjects. Due to this, I question myself, "Is it due to me?" Am I a failure?*

Interviewer:- What about the policy ma'am? Is there any need for a policy change?

Interviewee: If we talk about policy, policies are made but are not being implemented. Let us see about the 33 percent quota for women. That position is provided if there is a useless or difficult place where others do not want to go. For example, you can see that in the election of mayor and deputy mayor, the positions of mayor are occupied by males, and the deputy mayor is provided to females. Have you ever seen the mayor's position? It was a compulsion to provide the position, so only it was provided.

Interviewee:- Is it due to a lack of trust in women in leadership positions?

Interviewee:- Not like that, but I feel they (male) are scared of lacking. Ha..ha..ha..

Interviewee:- Thank you so much, ma'am! If I ask for something more to support my thesis, then again, I will bother you he..he..

Interviewee:- Sure! All the best for your thesis!