THE EDUCATIONAL PLANNING OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS: A CASE STUDY

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AN ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT APPROVED BY

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After the introduction of Constitution of the Government of Nepal in 2015, a full cycle of locally elected representatives completed their tenure assumed for effective service delivery to meet their demands at their doorsteps. The purpose of the study was to explore the process of educational planning at local governments.

I used a qualitative research design with an interpretative paradigm. I employed the case study approach in the study. I formed a case from the educational planning process of two local governments of Lumbini province, one from terai area and another from the hills area. The research intended to bring the experiences of local elected representatives' first five years (2017-2022) tenures. Thus I selected two municipalities and took in -depth interviews with the key personnel including the ex-mayors, ex-deputy mayors, the planning officers and the education section heads. I took two rounds of interviews with a total of eight personnel and completed the field work according to the tools. Additionally, I made close observations of the ongoing activities of the selected municipalities and also reviewed comprehensively their documents.

In this research, I used two theories: participation theory and structuration theory. Participation theory supported me to analyze the level of participation as the study is about the local governments practice and related stakeholders (as defined by the research questions) engagement in educational planning formulated in the local government it is significant to discuss the practice and their engagement which comprises the participation as a prominent principle. And the Structuration theory helped me to analyze the relationship between the planning system of local

governments as structure and active agency as senior elected leaders and key responsible staff. Structuration theory was conceptualized by sociologists that offers perspectives on human behavior based on a synthesis of structure and agency effects known as the “duality of structure.

The research argues that local level educational planning is unlikely to be meaningful and participatory, and aligned with the ethos of federal decentralization. The study found that the meaningful participation of stakeholders in formulating the process of educational planning that consider much helpful to enhance the quality education practices at local government and promotes quality education meeting the Local needs, and improved transparency, and accountability. Regardless, the educational planning is considered merely at a small unit and not prioritized as a core agenda as a separate entity in the planning process. The stakeholder's capacity and potential to contribute to educational planning seems largely underestimated. Addressing local stakeholder's concerns has been a challenge to the local governments.

This study also concludes that the participation theory has been influenced by structuration i.e. ladder of participation has been affected by agency and structure as the position of mayor and marginalized community member's participation also affect the participation level. The findings also suggest that although, the legal provision has forced equal and all representatives' active participation in the entire participatory planning process, still there is a room for improvement to create favorable environment for their effective participation. Equally, the research indicated that, despite better positions in the LISA, there are several gaps in planning provision and practices regarding formulation and implementation of education plans and programs of the researched local governments. To conclude, this study implies that the understanding of the local government personnel regarding educational planning, better partnerships and collaborations among the stakeholders, and their capacity building could positively contribute to improve educational planning culture and its effective implementation.

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DECLARATION

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

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DEDICATION

This work is profoundly dedicated to my mother, Devaka Neupane, and my father, Hemlal Neupane. Also, the work is dedicated to my wife Sabita Kanauje, and my son, Satkrit Neupane for their patience and encouragement to continue and complete my studies.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASIP	Annual Strategic Implementation Plan
AWPB	Annual Work Plan and Budget
CBO	Community Based Organization
CMS	Community Managed School
DEO	District Education Officer
DoE	Department of Education
ECA	Extra-Curricular Activities
EIMS	Education Information Management System
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GoN	Government of Nepal
I/NGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LGOA	Local Government Operation Act
LISA	Local Institutional Self-Assessment
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MoFAGA	Ministry of Federal Affairs & General Administration
MPHIL	Master of Philosophy
MTEF	Mid Term Expenditure Framework
NEP	National Education Policy
PCGG	Provincial Center for Good Governance
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PLGSP	Provincial and Local Governance Support Program
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SMC	School Management Committee
SSDP	School Sector Development Plan
SSRP	School Sector Reform Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The promulgation of Nepal's Constitution 2015 introducing federal system has provisioned three levels of government and gave exclusive and concurrent functions to local governments. The constitution has granted rights and priorities related to education following in accordance with the main goal of building an egalitarian, inclusive and socialist-oriented nation (Government of Nepal [GoN], 2015).Local governments exercise their power to formulate new policies, and programs and plan for their resource generation and proper utilization. During this process, they need to ensure local people's participation in every aspect of development, and a systematic planning process with seven- step approach is also legally provisioned. After the introduction of new constitutions 2015, a five years' tenure of locally elected representatives completed their tenure assumed for effective service delivery to meet their demands at their doorsteps.

Moreover, Article 31 of the constitution guarantees education is a basic right of citizens in the Nepal (GoN, 2015). In alignment with the constitutional mandate, the Local Government Operation Act, 2017, and Education Policy 2019 have presented 23 legal rights to the Local government to ensure basic education up to the basic and secondary levels (MoEST, 2019). In addition, education plan as a sectoral plan encorporated in annual local planning of local government, as a policy provision at article 6(24) of Local Government Operation Act, 2017 (MoFALD, 2017). These 23 legal rights include the provision of quality education, local curricula, planning and operation of practical education and vocational training including a provision of monitoring and evaluation. Further, Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 focus on education means as a quality of education, leaving no one behind an important agenda to be linked with the education plan of the local government (NPC, 2022). Moreover, Acharya and Zafarullah (2020) stated that the local government is expected to provide more effective social services as it is the closest governing body to the citizens, at their doorsteps.

In such context, The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology has prepared a 10-year school education sector plan for the development of school-level education in Nepal. The Local Government Operation Act 2017 also requires the

creation and implementation of an education plan in order to implement the right to education at the basic and secondary levels. In Section 24 (1) of the Local Government Operation Act 2017, the local level has also made a legal provision to prepare and implement periodical and sectoral plans. Realizing the need for an education plan to achieve collective goals and objectives through coordination and cooperation between the three tiers of government, the local government has started the practice of making five years' education plan which is to be implied through the sectoral plan related to education in annual local level planning. As a result, local level planning is directly linked with the education planning process as a sectoral theme which is to be implemented thorough annual planning and budgeting of local governments important to deliver services to the public

Several studies (Acharya, 2019; Acharya & Zafarullah, 2020; Dahal, 2020; MoEST, 2019; Singh, 2021) have discussed issues of local governments in planning but there is mere discussion on the understanding of the practice of engagement of related stakeholders precise to educational planning process linked with seven steps of local level planning. It is obvious that an effective education plan at the local level is for the rights of quality education in primary and secondary education capacitated by the local stakeholders themselves.

Therefore, it is imperative to explore the understanding and engagement of stakeholders in preparing planning and budgeting in local government precise to the educational planning process. Against this backdrop, in pursuit of finding the ground reality I decided to conduct case studies of selected municipalities about understanding and engagement of related stakeholders of local government in the education planning process. This chapter presents the understanding and engagement of local elected representatives and local government's personnel regarding local level educational planning after 2017.

Statement of the Problem

The logic behind devolution of power is to strengthen sectoral planning system and integrate education plan with local-level planning process (Acharya & Zafarullah, 2020). The Local Government Operation Act 2017 also requires the creation and implementation of an education plan in order to implement the right to education at the basic and secondary levels. Although the practice of formulating participatory planning has been going on for a long time in Nepal, with the transformation of the country into a federal government system, the access of citizens

is expected to be easier. On the one hand, it not only increased in the direct and active participation of the people in the governance system, and on the other hand, it also faced the challenge of meeting the expectations of the people with limited resources has also been added. As being the closest government to the people, such a challenge has to be faced at the local level. So, it is necessary to make the planning system at the local level more participatory, systematic, and effective for the maximum utilization of the available resources (NPC, 2022). However, the problem lies in the articulation and execution of inclusive plans and budgeting, with the engagement of stakeholders, that are designed by the structured formalities.

Nepal's constitution, federal, provincial, and local policies and laws are the main bases of planning at the local level. In Article 59 of the Constitution of Nepal, there is a provision for the federal, provincial, and local levels to prepare a plan for matters related to economic rights within their jurisdiction (GoN, 2015). To implement the policies and programs prioritized by Nepal's constitution, education policy, and existing laws in accordance with the federal structure, there is a need for a new plan at the federal level, state level, and local levels to guide the development of the school education sector. The Local Government Operation Act 2017 also requires the creation and implementation of an education plan in order to implement the right to education at the basic and secondary levels. In Section 24 (1) of the Local Government Operation Act 2017, the local level has also made a legal provision to prepare and implement periodical and sectoral plans (MoEST, 2019). So, making education plan is a new practice of local governments after 2017 and which is as a sectoral plan in implementation of education plan at local level. Municipalities are practicing five years' education plan to be incorporated through the sectoral plan in local level planning process following the seven-step planning process. In this process, in drafting the five years' education plan- that should be aligned with periodic plan- committee is formed with related stakeholders for the given time until its final draft is prepared. The stakeholders in the process are elected representatives, municipal authorities, school management committee chair, head teachers, teachers, civil society and community members. As a result, the participation of the stakeholders is important in the planning process in addressing the local needs and priorities. (MoEST, 2019). However, the empirical studies have shown that there are problems in planning process of local government but have not precisely brought up the issues on stakeholders understanding and engagement in education planning

process for effective implementation (Dhungana, 2019; MoFAGA, 2019a; NPC, 2022). Although the impact of education planning after decentralization has been analyzed in the literature due to the new practice of planning in federal context there is still no necessary researches education planning practice and engagement of stakeholders.

This indicates that more research is still anticipated to understand the barriers to the educational planning process as reflected as a sectoral plan in annual planning and budgeting of municipalities. People at the local level are facing difficulties in planning process that causes fail of formulating and implementing the plan addressing the local needs. (Dahal, 2020). In such situation, I believe that it would be practical to explore the understanding and experiences of stakeholders in educational planning at local governments. Moreover, this research also explores the challenges of making the educational planning process from participatory and inclusive perspectives.

Purpose of Study

The main purpose of my study is to explore the engagement of stakeholders in the process of local government's educational planning and to explore the challenges of making the educational planning process from participatory and inclusive perspectives.

Research Questions

With the above purpose of the study, the specific research questions are as follows:

a) How do the key actors of the local government (deputy/mayor, planning officers) understand local government's educational planning and its processes?
b) How are the local stakeholders engaged in the educational planning in the municipalities?
c) How do the local governments experience challenges in the educational planning process and how do they address them?

Significance of the Study

Nowadays, the decentralization has become popular agenda for many sectors of development with the power allocated to local government involved in various kinds of planning such as sectoral planning, development activities planning and delivering public service and goods to its citizen at local level (Adhikari, 2021). Educational planning as a thematic part of integrated planning of local government is

practicing the bottom-up approach of planning so that all its citizens have an equal chance to raise their voice so that their voice makes the difference in the planning process (Dahal, 2020).

This study is associated with the decentralization notion in the education sector. As this study is on the stakeholder's engagement in the educational planning of local government, it significantly helps the local government planners to adopt and exercise the educational planning approach. Moreover, proper educational planning and execution of the plans is pivotal for the development of education at the local level, where rarely literature have indicated the status of stakeholder's engagement in educational planning sector, which is very important to understand the why there is a problem in enriching quality and inclusive education in local government meeting their local needs (Parajuli et al., 2020).

Hence, research conducted on this subject can be useful for all three tiers of governments involved in the planning of education. Furthermore, participation in educational planning as a sectoral plan with the structure of local governments local level planning process helps the policy makers to review and implement decentralized approach in education which has been introduced to make stakeholders more responsible in Local Governments. The most vital significance is to identify the gap aligned with the practice to enhance the stakeholder's participation formulating education plan. This study as a whole helps strengthening federal governance at local level on general and enhance educational planning of the local government in particular.

Thesis Organisation

The thesis has been organized into eight chapters where the first chapter provides introduction to the background of my study, statement of the problem, purpose and research questions and study significance. The second chapter contains the review of literature which has been reviewed relevant to my research on the basis of the themes such as institutionalization of local government in planning, education plan and policy review of local government, education priorities of local government, stakeholder's engagement in education plan at local level and my theoretical approach.

Chapter three outlines the methodology of the study with description of the research paradigm including ontology and epistemology, research location and participants, field engagement and meaning-making process, my approach to

maintaining trustworthiness and ethical consideration of the study. Chapters fourth, fifth and sixth chapters present the findings in response to my three research questions. Chapter four, five and six addresses the research questions of this research. These three chapters (fourth, fifth & sixth) consist of themes that emerged from my study around stakeholder's understand and their engagement in educational planning.

Chapter seven is an outcome of the research work which presents the emerging insights which I have blended with the findings of the three research questions captured in chapter four, five and six. The discussion of the findings in this chapter is compared with different policies, theories, literatures and principles with my reflection. Finally, the last or the eighth chapter summarizes the whole research with the conclusion and implication of the research work.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this part, drawing from literature, I present some key ideas and discourses relevant to the issues of the education planning process in local government and stakeholder engagement in formulating, planning, implementing and monitoring and evaluation of education and its process with a focus on the municipalities in particular. I have conducted a comprehensive review of the relevant literature pertaining to both general and specific aspects of the research topic where education in local government is viewed as general and stakeholder's engagement in education planning process is taken as my specific research. Doing this review of literature, it also helped to prepare me the justification for the research questions to take place and how my study make a way forward from what has already been concluded (Frank, 2017). In the following sections, I have explored a review of literature related with education and stakeholder's engagement in planning under four subthemes as follows (a) Institutionalization of local government in planning (b)Education plan and policy review of local government (c) Education priorities of local government plan (d) Stakeholders engagement in education plan at local level.

Institutionalization of Local Government in Planning

The Nepali nation-state has been officially designated as a 'Federal Republic Nepal' through the enactment of the Constitution of Nepal (2015). This new form of governance, known as cooperative federalism, emphasizes the coexistence, interdependence, and interconnectedness among all provinces within Nepal. The federal operational system is characterized by a hierarchical structure. The Constitution holds significant authority, establishing a federal government at the national level, while also mandating the formation of seven provincial governments in the respective corresponding provinces. Furthermore, the Constitution facilitates the creation of local governments at each level of local governance, including the District Coordination Committee (DCC) at the district level (GoN, 2015). The 2015 Constitution of Nepal has promulgated provisions that delegate powers to the local levels in accordance with the specifications stipulated in schedule eight and nine. In accordance with the allocation of scheduling powers to the local levels, the local

government assumes responsibility for executing and delivering various administrative services to the general public. Acharya (2018) stated as the local government is a public entity that is limited to a small geographical area, such as a city or county, and serves as the closest and dependable representative organization for the local citizens. As Local government to provide service in their covered area with powers allocated local government energized themselves in practicing formulating and implementing the necessary laws, rules, guidelines, directives, procedures and action plans (Tuladhar & Lama, 2018).

The national planning commission establishment as a linked to Nepal's planned development cycle started in 1956 AD when the first five-year national development plan was mapped out. This foundation has created Nepal to continue in developing and practicing the periodical development method by articulating five or three year periodic plans. In this process Nepal has turn up with the 15th plan (NPC, 2019).

After the formation of three tiers of government and came into fully operation, the first plan known as the fourteenth plan (FY 2016/17 – 2018/19), also made an effort to sustainable goals and targets to internalize as the first periodic plan. However, this plan was focused on addressing the recovery from earthquake and infrastructure development with less priority in education development sector. The Fifteenth Plan (FY 2019/20 -2023/24), with its foresighted vision of “Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali” is considered as underpinning plan to meet that very vision and also to direct this vision aligning with the periodic plans of the provinces and local levels (NPC, 2019).

The participatory planning mechanism employed at the local level promotes the engagement of citizens in the decision-making process pertaining to the identification, execution, and administration of development plans. The planning process in Nepal, which has been commandeered by the country's privileged elite, has elicited criticism for being biased towards marginalized groups (Acharya et al., 2022). However, the role of municipal authorities as stakeholders in promoting the participatory level in planning is still a need of research in local government. As, planning is a carefully orchestrated process that involves a combination of technical and political considerations to design goals and missions, formulate appropriate strategies and objectives, and ultimately implement developmental activities. This

process necessitates the integration of various components, including but not limited to resources, technology, and ideas (Malekpour et al., 2015).

There has been a notable shift in the planning process in developing countries that aims to include local communities in decision-making, resource allocation, and project implementation (Cilliers & Timmermans, 2014). He further stated that to generate a better understanding of the real needs and demands of the populations in that area is a notable question. As participatory process ensures the democratic involvement of individuals in the development endeavour, as well as the equitable distribution of benefits and decision-making authority in development of programs (Cheyne, 2015). In contrast, Acharya and Zafarullah (2020) stated that the main issue in weakening the capacity of local government bodies is the federal government superiority over resource mobilization, inadequate administrative exercise in Local Governments lawmaking process and transformation in administrative system.

During the 1980s, the implementation of participatory development was deemed a prominent policy agenda that facilitated a transformation of the attitudes surrounding local-level planning initiatives and the manner in which participation is incorporated into the planning process (Kelly & Westoby, 2018). In 1960, a political system known as the 'Panchayat' was established, which established a hierarchical framework of governance consisting of five tiers, namely the Central Government, Five Regional Development Regions, 14 Zones, 75 Districts, and a numerous local bodies such as Village and Rural Panchayats. (Chaudhary, 2019). Since the mid-1990s, the employ of participatory development strategies, such as visioning exercises and participatory planning, have become increasingly prevalent (Chambers, 1994). The involvement of citizens, government officials, and other relevant stakeholders in the process of policy formulation and the provision of government services through participatory planning is known to facilitate effective linkages, constructive consultation, and the empowerment of citizens to achieve tangible outcomes (Dutta, 2020).

In Nepal, the establishment of a planning mechanism was achieved through the formation of the National Planning Committee in 1941, tasked with preparing a comprehensive 15-year plan (Pant, 1966). The inception of the planned development initiative materialized in the 1990s through the establishment of local bodies and the prioritization by elected officials of decentralized planning, also known as bottom-up

planning. This approach aimed to afford citizens the chance to actively participate in local governance (Bhusal, 2018).

In addition to this, The SDG4 is one of the important issues to be linked with education planning in the process of formulating plans, policies and guidelines by the local (NCE Nepal, 2018). Moreover, as stated by Adhikari (2021) the elected representatives along with the beneficiaries like local level personnel must capacitate themselves on enhancing their knowledge in the development planning process.

The local-level planning in Nepal has been shaped by the predominant political system and/or pre-existing contextual circumstances begun almost hundred years ago. The present analysis delineates a sequence of four distinct phases, which have defined the evolution of planning contexts in the studied area. Specifically, these phases include the Partyless Pancha-led planning period spanning from 1960 to 1990, followed by elected political cadre-led planning from 1991 to 2002, all-party-mechanism-led planning from 2002 to 2016, and currently, elected political party representative-led planning since 2017 to till date. The Local Self-Governance Act, 1999 (LSGA) and its corresponding by-law served as guiding policies for local bodies, including the establishment of bottom-up planning and implementation processes (Acharya, 2021). During this tenure, external stakeholders, including sectoral line agencies, civil society groups, non-government organizations (NGOs), and the private sector, have actively participated in in facilitating local-level planning (Acharya, 2014; Pandey & Shrestha, 2016). Although, Local Government Operation Act have foster a bottom-up planning approach and guaranteeing adequate representation of marginalized groups such as women, Dalits, Janajatis, children's groups, mothers' groups, and people with disabilities in local level planning processes, still there is lot to explore their scenario in real ground in planning process precise to education.

The important role of education planning is to achieve the expected results by implementing educational services effectively and to ensure access, quality, participation and equity in education. After the Local Government Operation Act 2017 transferred the authority of basic and secondary level education to the local level, the education programs are being implemented through the local level. There is a need to create an education plan to fulfil the goals and objectives set by the federal government, the provincial government and the local government. In this context, educational planning process is important for achieving the aspirations and local

needs of education (MoEST, 2019). Since my research is based on the local governments educational planning process linked with the structure of local government and its relation with the stakeholders as an agency with the level of participation to education planning.

Education Plan and Policy Review of Local Government

The Constitution of Nepal (2015) provides its citizen with the right to education and rights as fundamental rights. Article 31 provisions that every citizen shall have the right to get compulsory and free education up to the basic level and free education up to the secondary level from the State. In Section 24 (1) of the Local Government Operation Act 2017, the local level has also made a legal provision to prepare and implement periodical and sectoral plans (MoEST, 2019).

After the Local Government Operation Act 2017 transferred the authority of basic and secondary level education to the local level, the education programs are being implemented through the local level turned the need of education plan for effective implementation of education in municipalities. Substantiating, Article 21 provisioned that every citizen has the right to participate in government directly or by representatives, and equal access to public services. Further, the declaration provisioned the right to education (free and compulsory for elementary and equally acceptable for higher education) which has to be directed to human personality development, strengthening respect for basic freedom of educational choice as human rights (Article 26). Moreover, education policies in Nepal have been acknowledged to supply a direct toward acknowledged strategies and goals. As a result, the approaches distinguish the most activities and back with the common procedure to decision-makers on dealing with the issues as they emerge (Acharya, 2019).

Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (2019) in the National Education Policy 2019 has focused local government responsibilities as developing plans, program formulation of laws related for basic to secondary education which also includes technical and vocational education, planning, program formulation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and regulation and basic school permit, approval, management and regulation. Moreover, formation and management of village and city education committee and school management committee, developing own local curriculum and the distribution and implementation of textbooks and the curriculum developed at the province and federal levels is also highlighted as major responsibilities of local government in education. Creating and implementing school

quality improvement plans and programs, implementation of compulsory and free education, student incentive management is the most important task provided to the local government (MoEST, 2019).

Nation can be transformed through the means of education only if it is sufficiently and effectively planned otherwise a misleading education plan can seriously effect a nation's progress for long time (Akpan, 2000). Moreover, education acts as a blueprint that supports economic, political, social and technological progress of a nation.

Education's crucial aims are justice, equality, efficiency, management, governance, and flexibility (MoE, 2016). School Sector Development Plan (SSDP), 2016-2023 basic and secondary level educational planning, emphasized teachers' management based on their performance, fostering inclusive education policy, developing effective human capital and private abilities, distribution of power, authority, management, and established system or culture of an improved Education Information Management System (EIMS) which direct, analyse and evaluate the real condition of educational activities and performance with effective leadership. Moreover, SSDP (2016-2023) also endorsed educational activities that are useful administratively and integrate leadership opinion to increase the quality of education in public schools. However, the SSDP highlighted considerable supportive policies, plans, and approaches to uplift public school education performance. Nonetheless, all the mentioned plans, and approaches could not perform as per their aim because of various hurdles and negligence in implementation. As a result, clear gap between the objective of plans and their effective implementation (MoE, 2016).

Furthermore, the Local Government Operation Act (MoLJPA, 2017) provides for issues such as free and compulsory education policy, schools as a zone of peace, equity strategy to address excluded children and safe schools, and new educational policies related to the federal context, but their modality is still under discussion.

The School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP, 2009-2016) clearly stated that decentralization in education through delegating significant roles to Local government, including the SMC for planning, management, and monitoring. SSRP program 2009- 2016 and Final Report (2016) highlighted that for quality education in school responsibility and capacity of PTAs and SMCs need to be strengthened.

Furthermore, the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP, 2016-2023) has started continuing to follow the achievement and learning of SSRP (2009-2016). The

SSDP has primarily emphasized privatizing the role of local government for developing need-based educational planning, implementing it, and monitoring from the local level.

Though the policy has a beautiful provision for the planning provision of education of basic and secondary level, it has not yet been implemented. In this regard, I have some arguments as to how the practices and engagement of stakeholders have not been effective in preparing and implementation of educational planning? why these issues have not been given priorities from federal, provincial to local level? My concern on the gap was fulfilled by exploring how stakeholders understand and engage themselves in educational planning of local government.

Education Priorities of Local Government Plan

In accordance with Article 31 of the Constitution of Nepal (2015), an obligatory provision has been established mandating that every citizen possesses the right to compulsory and free education up to the basic level and free education up to the secondary level, provided by the State. With related to this, in the same year 2015, the United Nations welcomed Nepal in signing the Incheon Declaration, fully dedicated to execute the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) with SDG 4, focused in education for promoting inclusive and equitable quality education thus providing space for all by nurturing life-long learning opportunities (NPC,2019). The National Planning Commission, in its capacity as the leading planning authority for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (2016-2030), has been identified as a crucial resource for the development of the Nepal National Framework for SDG 4. This framework seeks to enhance human capital development in Nepal in accordance with global commitments, and to address the challenges in the 21st century. In preparing the planning focuses should be in prosperity of the citizens and progress of the local area (Dahal, 2020). Participatory process has been conducted with stakeholders, local government, provincial government and federal government and others while developing the framework which supposed to provide blueprints with key strategies to meet targets of Goal 4 (NPC, 2020).

These rights include the provision of physical infrastructure of the school, management, quality education, provision and management of human resources of the school, training of teachers, protection and management of school related property, permission, monitoring and management of mother tongue schools, planning and operation of technical and vocational educational training with provision of

monitoring, evaluation (MoFALD, 2017). These rights are geared towards ensuring access to basic and secondary level education, with a particular focus on addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities and other marginalized communities. Moreover, Sustainable Development Agenda, have established education as quality education, leaving no one behind the fifteenth plan has prioritized in quality education and aims to increase the literacy rate to 99% (NPC, 2019), which has also increased the responsibility of the Local Government for effective plans and activities.

School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) started in the year 2016 as the implementation year, the year when the Sustainable Development Goals implementation started and therefore this was the best opportunity to localize the global framework in the national and local context (MoE, 2016). In addition to this, SSDP (2016 – 2023), is a sectoral plan which supports to meeting the targets of SDG 4 that aim to contribute improving equitable access to education (MoEST, 2019). Moreover, the targets and objectives of SDGs including SDG4 have been well incorporated in the five-year periodic plan (NPC, 2020).

As Local Governments are the nearest government for doorsteps for service delivery in enhancing education, the local government have to play major role in reaching the measurable targets for SDG 4 within 2030 that include 99.5 percent net enrolment where target population completes primary education while in other hands 99 percent gross enrollment in secondary education. Moreover 95 percent of students enrolled in grade one reached grade eight. Youth and adult's ratio having pertinent expertise also includes technical, and vocational skills for entrepreneurship and service meets 75 percent. In addition to these, at least 98 percent of adults, both men and women including all youths, accomplish literacy and numeracy (NPC, 2019). However, the efforts of local and province governments have not brought the real scenario of the SDG linked with the education plan at local level (NCE Nepal, 2020).

Moreover, Patole (2018) has indicated the challenge that the internalization of SDG 4 has not been much in focus as there is little emphasis by the concerned stakeholders. However, the commitment in the background lacks sufficient focus in the procedures, allocation of resources, and establishing the baseline and target to guarantee that the outcomes of the sustainable development are reachable for all communities and individuals (Pant, 2021).

Moreover, education planning is a cycle of recognizing, and categorizing the educational priority of the state focus with the strategies for executing decisions

related to educational development (Akpan, 2000). Education is the primary agenda in plan as it ensures the right to free higher education focusing for both disabled and economically weaker citizens with right to achieve an education in their own mother language. In order to address the needs of locals, the existing federal system of government has implemented a bottom-up approach of planning so that Local Governments are motivated to exercise it for drafting policy and implementing development activities.

The education sector holds for the largest portion of the budget coming to the local level from the federal government. However, a significant part of it goes to the salary allowance of teachers and staff. Apart from this most of the elected local representatives could not provide feedback to teachers as a result the quality of education has been difficult to maintain in local government (Parajuli et al., 2020). After the Local Government Operation Act 2017 transferred the authority of basic and secondary level education, the education programs are being implemented through the local level. In this regard the educational plan of the municipalities has been provided the priority where effective formulation and implementation is a matter of concern.

Stakeholders Engagement in Education Plan at Local Level

The Constitution of Nepal (2015), Article 31 guarantees the access to education as a basic right of citizens. In alignment with constitution mandate, the Local Government Operation Act, 2017 has given 23 powers to the local level government as rights to ensure the basic education up to the basic and secondary level. These rights include the provision of physical infrastructure of the school, management, quality education, provision, and management of human resources of the school, training of teachers, protection and management of school related property, permission, monitoring and management of mother tongue schools, planning and operation of technical education, monitoring and evaluation. Local government at local level have to engage themselves in formulating plan and polices to implement rights effectively.

It is necessary for the government at all three levels to formulate periodic plans and implement them effectively. For this, it is necessary to have harmony in the policies, plans, budgets, and programs formulated by the three levels in order to effectively implement the policies, plans, budgets, and programs of the federal, provincial, and local levels. Moreover, the Local Government Operational Act 2017

made it a policy that the local level should create and implement periodic plans as well as thematic plans.

In addition, periodic plans and medium-term expenditure structures, which were formulated only at the national level in the past, have to be made mandatory at the provincial and local levels, which is a new practice for the provincial and local levels after 2017(NPC, 2022). Periodic plans, medium-term expenditure structures, budgets and annual programs for national, provincial, and local priorities, availability of resources, and their optimal mobilization and strategic interventions guide the government for planning and effective service delivery (MoFAGA, 2019) The Inter-Government Fiscal Arrangement Act, 2017 as a major tool of financial management, has made it mandatory for all three levels of government to formulate a medium-term expenditure structure including a three-year budget projection when presenting the details of public expenditure.

As a decentralized educational plan, participation of stakeholders, adoption, maximum utilization and utilization of resources and means, improvement of educational quality, etc. are considered as important features. The school improvement plan and village town education plan are seen as important plans of the decentralized education plan.

In the same way, the formulation of the education plan of the education sector has also been started at the provincial level. After the Local Government Operation Act 2017 transferred the authority of basic and secondary level education to the local level, the education programs are being implemented through the local level. There is a need to create an education plan to fulfill the goals and objectives set by the federal government, the state government and the local government. In this context, this guidance has been prepared by adopting the process and framework of the planning process mentioned in the School Implementation Plan (MoEST, 2021).

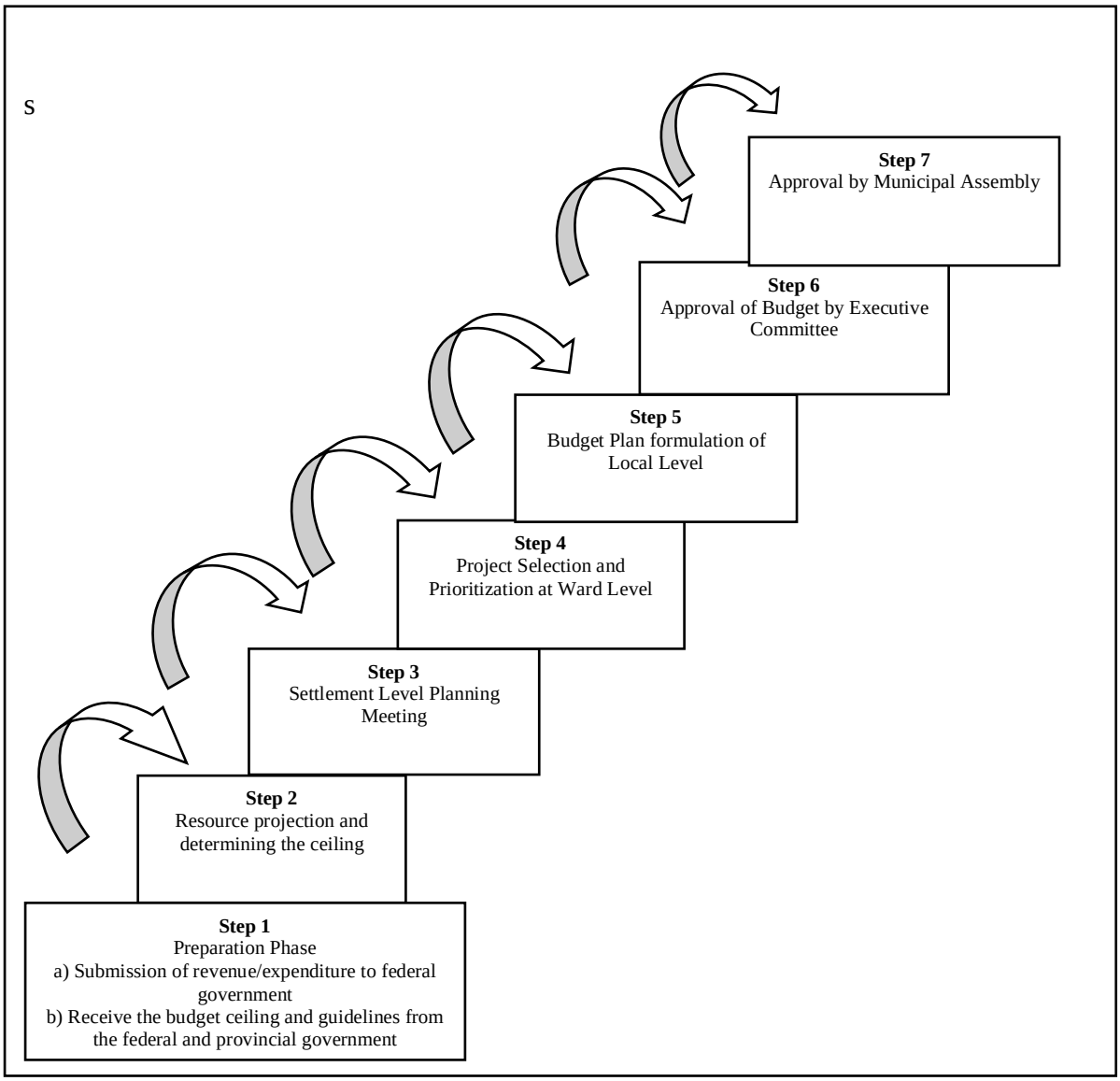
In order to implement the policies and programs prioritized by Nepal's constitution, education policy, and existing laws in accordance with the federal structure, there is a need for a new plan at the federal level, provincial level, and local levels to guide the development of the school education sector. In order to assimilate the development and changes in the current science and technology and to prepare citizens who are creative, active, and useful for the economic and social transformation of Nepal, it seems that the education system should also be improved to make the contribution of education timely. The Ministry of Education, Science, and

Technology has prepared a 10-year school education sector plan for the development of school-level education in Nepal. The Local Government Operational Act 2017 also requires the creation and implementation of an education plan in order to implement the right to education at the basic and secondary levels. In Section 24 (1) of the Local Government Operational Act 2017, the local level has also made a legal provision to prepare and implement periodical and sectoral plans.

Realizing the need for an education plan to achieve collective goals and objectives through coordination and cooperation between the three tiers of government, the Local Government has started the practice of making five years' education plan which is to be implied through the sectoral plan related to education in annual local level planning (MoEST, 2021). In this regard the educational planning process of five years' plan have prescribed the procedures followed during the preparation of the plan as executive meeting decision, formation of the planning committee/task force, attendance and decision-making of stakeholder meetings, preparation of the first draft, finalization of the plan, evaluation of the scheme and status of plan approval and implementation in local level (MoEST, 2021). However, the five years' education plan in local municipalities are implemented through the sectoral plan that is prepared simultaneously as a sectoral plan in annual planning and budgeting of local government within the context of the existing federal framework, a seven-step planning methodology (as shown in Figure 1) has been established for the development of annual plans and the projection of budgets at the local level. In this structure, municipalities and ward offices municipal authorities and committees with community members and related stakeholders are active in formulating the education plan in local level.

Figure 1

Seven Steps Planning Process at Local Government

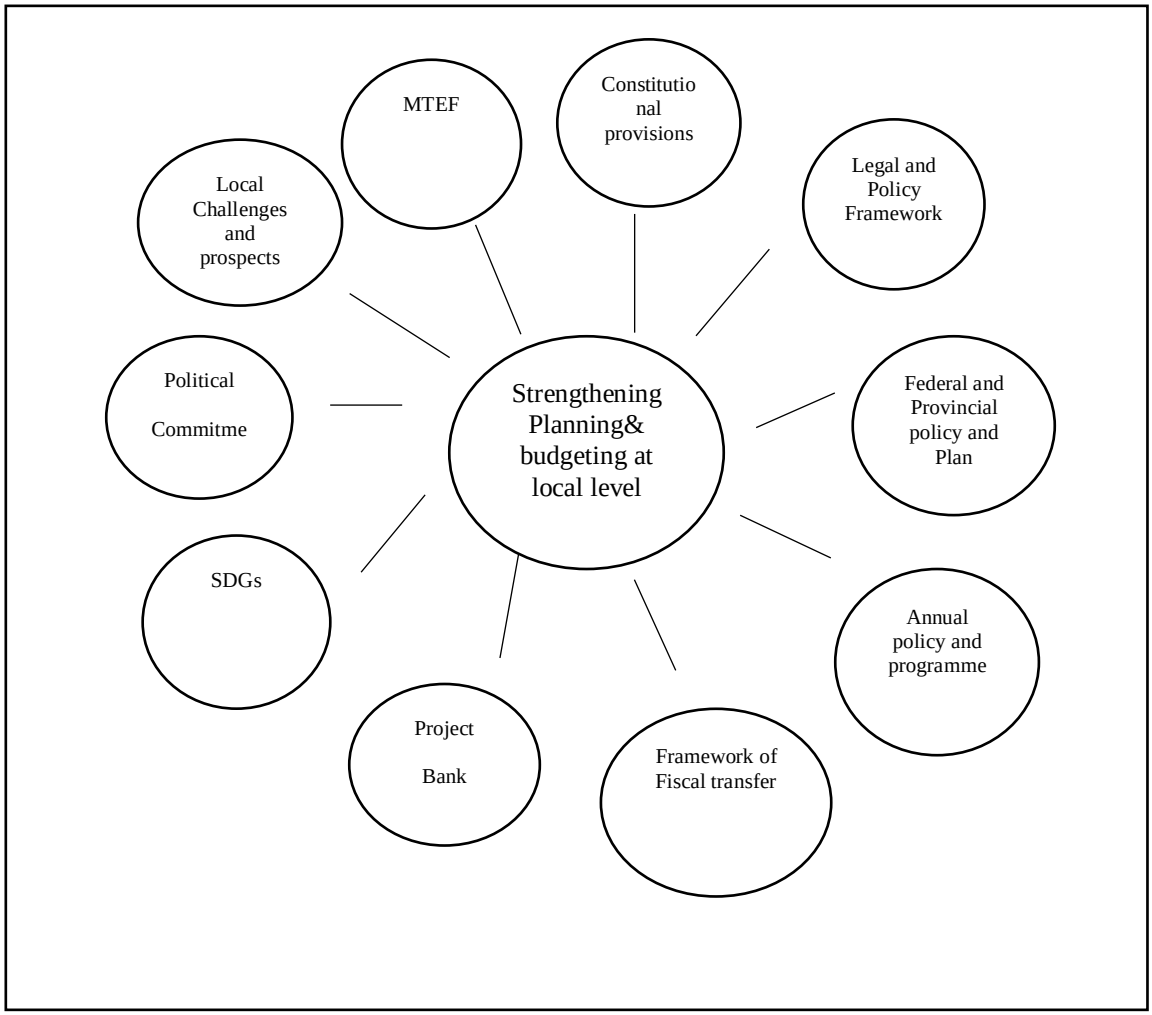


(MoFAGA,2019)

Implementation plan, and a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan. The legal framework tools for local level annual work plan and budget are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Components for Strengthening Planning and Budgeting Process at Local Government



Wagle (2021) states that, the federal and provincial governments both avoid their key responsibility to empower the local governments so as to enable them in project selection, planning, allocative efficiency and transparent public procurement practices as result local governments compromised to carry out their local plans in implementation. Moreover, the local government has encountered hurdles related to the development and maintenance of physical infrastructure, adequacy of economic resources, and the availability of adequate human resources (Dhital, 2018). Likewise, Poxon (2001) states that the important role of the stakeholders as a planner is to understand the real process and should involve themselves in the shaping the task rather than just completing the cycle for fulfilling the planning process. However,

Gupta (2021) blames that the degree of citizen participation in local development planning and discussion is relatively low.

Dhital (2018) also emphasizes that skilled human resource as per market demand in education sector have not been fulfilled, an obstacle in equitable access and assurance of quality. He also indicates that lack of proper management of educational institutions are creating the challenges in effective implementation of education which should be the major changes in government'seducational decentralization policies. The absence of well-informed democratic discourse, deliberative processes, and inputs has resulted in marked agency issues at the community level. Hence, a deficiency in accountability mechanisms has expanded to the point of causing a rupture in the democratic linkage between the government and its citizens (Rijal, 2023). As a result, there may be a risk of the government to fail in creating a genuine feeling of ownership in the local community in Local Government while implementing planning related to education (Hamal, 2020).

Pandeya and Shrestha (2016), concluded that citizen active participation broadens and enriches the participatory platform for all citizens and civil society in local planning but also there is a risk of different interests that create new opportunities for corruption and other risk of apprehended as local elites diverted participatory organizations to their own benefits. But it has not mentioned the process of engagement in participatory process is formed for reducing such chances. Moreover, the initiatives undertaken by federal and provincial governments do not hold much significance for individuals at the grassroots level but, the actions and plans implemented by local governments have garnered significant attention and become a primary area of focus and concern (Kanel, 2019).

The review of empirical evidences (e.g. Acharya, 2019; Chaudhary, 2019; Hamal, 2020; Neupane, 2019; Pandeya & Shrestha, 2016) from the above literatures of the international as well as national contexts have addressed the planning process of local level and targeted stakeholders for performing the planning and problems faced in the implementation of planning. I learned that local stakeholders in planning process, the structure of the Local Government have difficulties to participate in educational planning process. However, I did not find these studies have addressed stakeholders as an agency interact with the Local Governments as a structure to address the participation in the educational planning process has been the issue of my research.

My Theoretical Lenses: Participation Theory and Structuration Theory

As the study is about local governments' practices (as defined by my research questions) in educational planning through the engagement of local stakeholders, it comprises the participation and participatory processes as prominent principle and the structures and the agents of the local governments as another lens of the theory.

Participation Theory

The participation of the stakeholders includes exercising authority to improve school administration, education plan, quality education, promoting accountability and enhancing participatory culture in planning process. Participatory planning process at the local level motivates citizens to enroll in the management, selection of their choices and its implementation of the development plans (Kanel, 2019). According to Arnstein (1969), participation refers to a hierarchy of power among individuals, wherein individuals who lack access to resources are able to participate through information sharing, policy preparation, and resource allocation. Arnstein who defines that participation serves as a strategy for empowering marginalized individuals and bridging the gap between those who have and have-nots, by providing them with access to information and control over resources. Similarly, according to Gaber (2019), participation entails the redistribution of power among citizens, thereby facilitating the empowerment and realization of the goals of marginalized, disadvantaged, and excluded individuals within both the community and institutional contexts.

In 1979, Chambers made a concerted effort to prioritize participatory development by emphasizing the significance of putting those in marginalized communities at the forefront of the development process "putting the last first". This approach fostered a more comprehensive and participatory planning and decision-making process that resulted in greater inclusivity, acceptance, and enhanced efficiency and cost-effectiveness of services rendered (Ward, 2010). According to Chambers (1994), participatory development is a multifaceted process that entails active involvement of individuals in decision-making, planning, execution, and evaluation of projects that directly impact them.

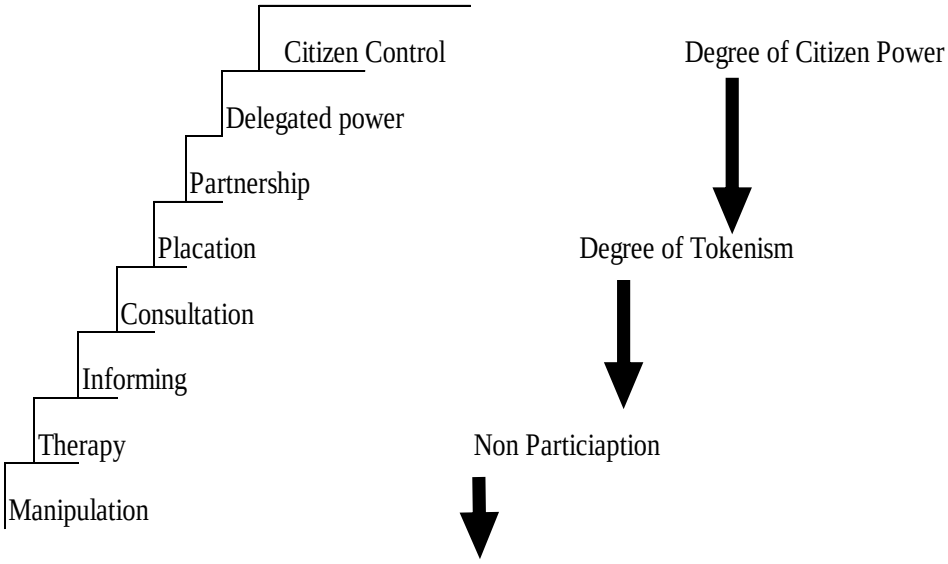
Waheduzzaman (2010) also highlights different stages of participation which give emphasis on informing (one-way communication), consulting (two-way communication), involving (deciding together), collaborating (acting together) and

empowering (supporting independent community interests). However, this study has adopted the participation theory described by Arnstein (1969).

Participation theory introduces a typology of participation that serves as a valuable tool for examining the knowledge, level of engagement, and extent of practice among relevant stakeholders (Arnstein, 1969; Quick and Bryson (2016). According to Arnstein (1969), to measure the level of the participation, eight levels of participation (from lower to higher level): manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. She describes, the first two levels refer to as non-participation level, the third, fourth and fifth indicate tokenism and the topmost level refers to real citizen participation which is presented as a ladder of participation in Figure 3.

Figure 3

A Ladder of Participation



(Arnstein, 1969)

According to the figure, the first and second rungs (Manipulation and Therapy) indicate the level of "non-participation" that has been forced by some to replace for genuine participation who do not want to allow people to engage in the planning or implementing the plans. Likewise, the third and the fourth rungs (Informing and Consultation) reach the levels of "tokenism" that permits the power to fewer people (have-nots) to hear and to raise their voices. Under these conditions, Arnstein asserts that those people who lack the power to ensure expressing their

views/opinions will be heard by the power holders. Further, in these levels the participation is delimited and there is no guarantee of changing the status quo. The fifth rung (Placation) Arnstein (1969) presents as upper-level tokenism because the ground rules permits the people who have not power (have-nots) to advise and suggest but power holders have the right to decide. The sixth rung (Partnership) enables citizens (and related stakeholders) to arrange and participate in the concerns with traditional power holders. On top of that, the seventh and the eighth (Delegated Power and Citizen Control) powerless citizens (have-nots) can be able to obtain the majority of decision- making positions (Arnstein, 1969). This is known as meaningful citizen participation as well.

Structuration Theory

The stakeholder's engagement in the educational planning process in Local Government was the central theme of my research. For this, I have explained the context of stakeholders in local government as the main agency and how their human behavior is either empowered or is constrained by institutional factors called “Structures” as stated by Anthony Giddens (1984) in this Structuration theory. This theory argues that the optimal societal arrangement involves the replication of duality in both action and structure, as opposed to treating them as distinct entities. According to him, an individual's autonomy is influenced by the prevailing societal structures, which themselves are reliant on the exercise of agency as a fundamental premise. The term "structuration" refers to the interaction between an actor and a structure.

Giddens (1984) explanation of 'structure' indicates various resources and order where the capacity of humans rely on to execute social activities, preferably than being superficial to the behavior of human agents. Thus, structure becomes both the means of social practice. Society is changed due to the influence of structure to agency and agency to structure. According to Giddens, 1984 as transformative capacity to the action, human agency indicates the potentiality of people to perform things to make things occur.

Giddens provides that structuration theory attempts to understand human social behavior by resolving the competing views of structure-agency and macro-micro perspectives. Similarly, this processes can take place at the interface between the actor and the structure and, it takes the position that social action cannot be fully explained by the structure or agency theories alone. Instead, it recognizes that actors operate within the context of rules produced by social structures, and only by acting in

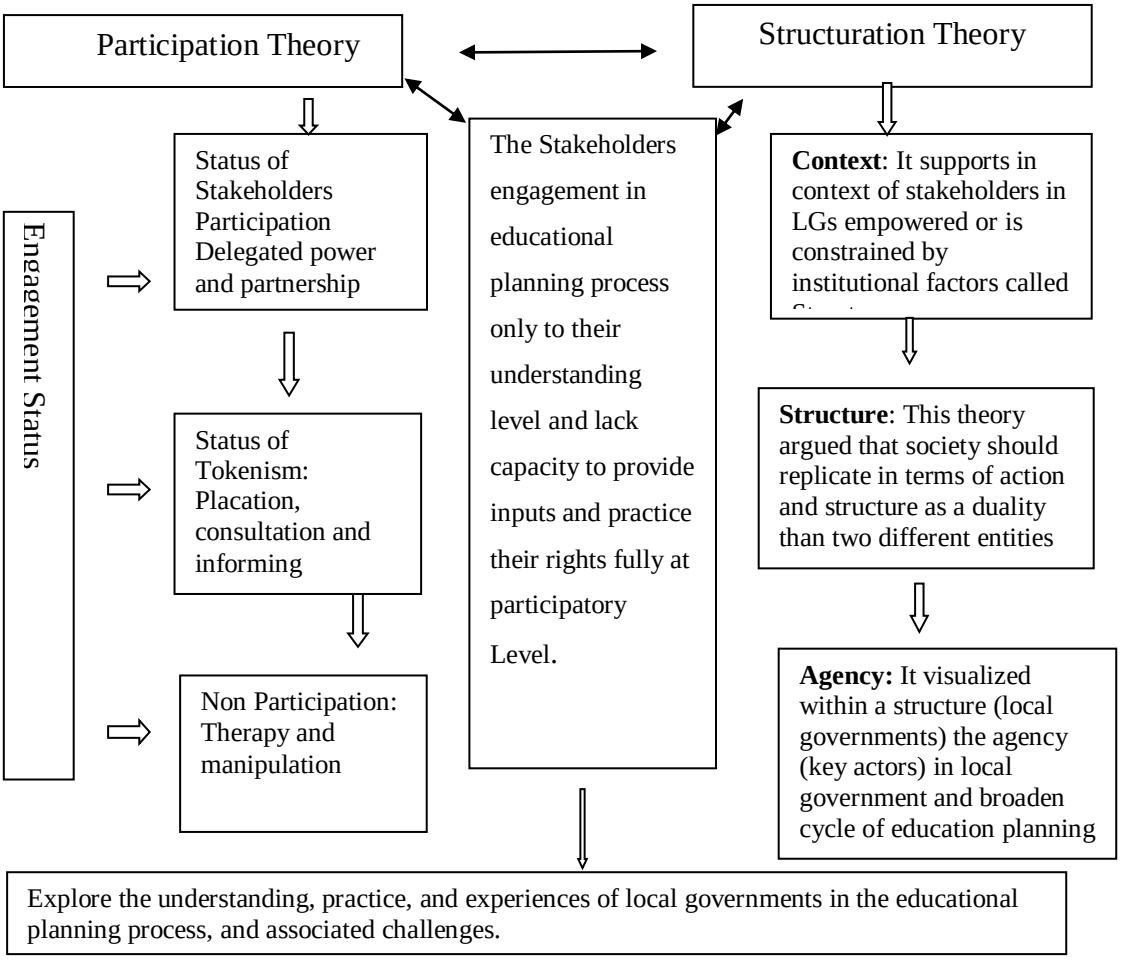
a compliant manner are these structures reinforced. As a result, social structures have no inherent stability outside human action because they are socially constructed. Alternatively, through the exercise of reflexivity, agents modify social structures by acting outside the constraints the structures place on them.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Perspective helps researcher to gain further understanding and insight regarding the study, and they enable them to use theories systematically while approaching the field for data collection and while making interpretations (Moen, 2006). With understanding the theoretical concept of participation and the layer of participation level, I have tried to link this concept in this research for constructing the data collection and analysis process with linking the identified structure of participation of different stakeholders in educational planning at local level. As participation theory is directly connected with the participation of stakeholders, I choose to explore how they understand and experience their participation in educational planning at Local Governments and how their participation contributes to making the educational planning work. Further, it reinforced me to have new knowledge about their participation in educational planning that may be significant to many actors related to planning and budgeting especially educational planning process. The theories that guided this study were Participation theory and Structuration Theory. The following figure 4 clearly reflects the theoretical framework for this study.

Figure 4

Theoretical Framework of My Research

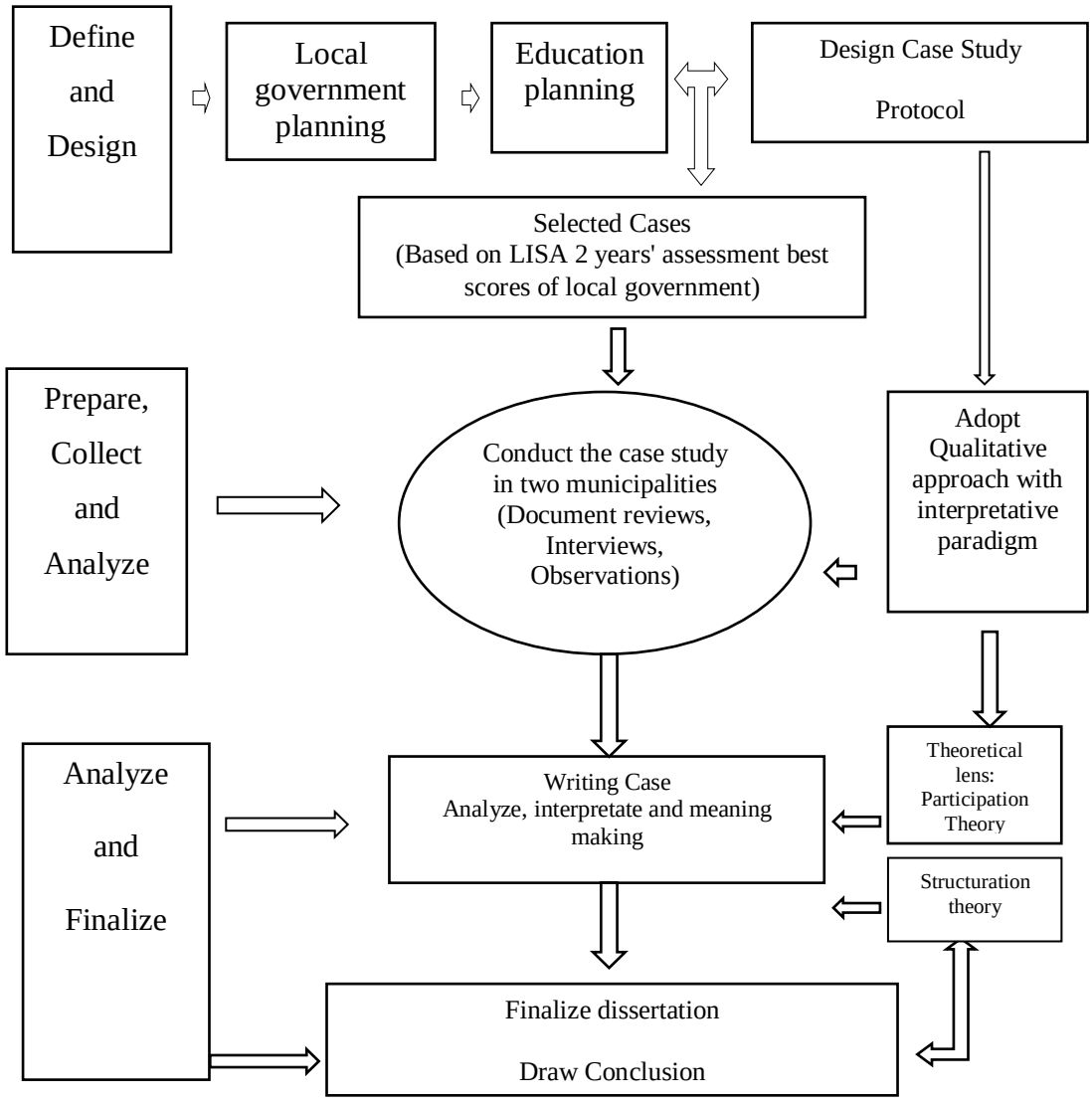


Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework in research is very significant in the sense that it provides a focus for an inquiry in our study. Jabareen (2009) has defined it as "a network or plan of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena". He further state that conceptually specified categories significantly describe and explain the pattern of relationship that qualitative studies aim to achieve. Regarding the conceptual framework of the study, the local government personnel's understanding, practices and the challenges they experienced while drafting the educational plan is analysed with the lens participation and structuration theory. The following figure 5 clearly reflects the conceptual framework for this study.

Figure 5

Conceptual Framework of My Research.



Concluding the Chapter

In this chapter, I reviewed relevant literature associated with local development planning process of Nepal particularly focusing on educational planning process. I also reviewed the policies and major programs related to education and local level planning. During the review of the literature, I eloquently presented my interpretation linking with the purpose of my research. Moreover, I have underlined the research gaps regarding educational planning in local governments. I found major gaps on how stakeholders engage themselves in exercising their right to education in education planning process without neglecting local needs and demands. I have also outlined related theories related with my research topic, namely structuration theory and participation theory. The chapter also brought the theoretical framework and conceptual framework applied in this research.

CHAPTER III
SETTING MY ROADMAP IN RESEARCH

This chapter presents my roadmap in the research philosophy and methodology. Under the research philosophy, I define my paradigm with ontological and epistemological stances. Likewise, under the methodology I describe my way of doing qualitative research-- which is case study approach-- and detailed elaborations about the research site, research participants, research tools and techniques along with data analysis and meaning making procedures. Furthermore, this chapter also brings ethical consideration to my research.

My Research Philosophy and Paradigm

Philosophy and Paradigm guide the researcher as it is the study is the worldview through which we base our research. In doing so my study has explored how stakeholders related to education planning engage themselves in education planning in local government for effective implementation of educational activities meeting local needs and harmonizing with existing laws and policies of the nation and how is educational planning in local government in education. Every researcher has a certain set of beliefs and principle and rule that guide each action of the research which are known as a paradigm (Creswell & Creswell 2018). Therefore, I have planned to set the lens of my paradigm for the study as Interpretive. Willis (2007) stated, as an interpretivism is favorable such as case studies and interviews, these methods are better ways to explain how people perceive the world surrounding them. Basically, in research activities, the worldviews refer to a general orientation of a researcher about the world and the nature of the research. Likewise, the set of beliefs that guide the researcher's action is called research paradigm that guided a researcher to choose the research approach and methods as well (Creswell & Creswell 2018). They further stand up for the argument that researchers who believe in the interpretive paradigm find out the reality through participants' views and experiences, and their own backgrounds and experiences. This section covers the philosophical considerations to determine the ontological, epistemological and axiological posture and philosophical dimensions of my research.

Adopting the interpretive paradigm, I have interpreted the results and detail the meaning too, rather than just understanding what has been researched. Since the

educational planning process can have serval dimensions, it is more of a subjective exploration. As stated by Newman (2015), this study has devoted me as an interpretivist in participant's observation and field research where I have spent several hours in personal interaction with those being observed to acquire an in-depth understanding of how they engage themselves in education planning until I reach information saturation.

According to Bryman (2018), the selection of a research design heavily relies on the ontological and epistemological perspectives. Ontology, as a branch of philosophy, concerns itself with the fundamental nature of existence and its component entities. It poses fundamental inquiries regarding the nature of existence and the essential classifications of reality (Neuman, 2015). My ontology in this research is relative realism where I assume reality is contextual and subjective in nature. As my research intends to explore the understanding and experience of stakeholder's participation and practice in education planning, it is based on subjective reality. So, it seeks the subjective interpretations of stakeholders' views and experiences with regards to engagement in planning activities at the local government level. Similarly, I believe that the participants of my research have diverse understanding, level of knowledge and experiences that reflect multiple realities. Regarding my ontological assumption, Educational planning are formed and developed based on the agencies of the mayors, deputy mayors, planning officers and Local people. Hence, their engagement in educational planning experiences are different depending on the individual among stakeholders. It means, each individual may have a different reality based on the different context i.e., location, social-economic position, level of awareness, education, gender, and professions. Thus, the participants involved in my research have multiple realities in different contexts. Their perception, engagement and understandings also vary. Since, my research is a qualitative study, there will be multiple realties based on the diverse experiences and understandings of participants in different social contexts regarding education planning practices in local governments.

Epistemology is the issue of how we know the world around us or what makes a claim about it true. The epistemological position of my research is that knowledge is contextual and constructed by society and it is concerned with what and how we know. Epistemology is a way of looking at the world and deals with the existing nature of knowledge and the connection exists with the researcher and participants

(Mertens, 2015). Moreover, the knowledge I assume in this research action is created by constructivism as I am an interpretive researcher in this research. My epistemology is that there are different capacity and understanding for planning needs of stakeholders in local government are subjective and thus exploratory. The interpretive epistemology is one of subjectivism which is based on real world phenomena.

Axiology is known as the philosophy of ethics and values. Therefore, as the research has been conducted with certain hopes and attitude regarding my experience and interest in the subject without being biased and judgmental. I obtained the knowledge by analyzing the information collected by interpretive research method (case study). I value quality, inclusion, participation, transparency, and good governance.

Research Methodology

As guided by the research purpose, and philosophical stances, here, for this research, I have applied the qualitative approach. Being guided with the qualitative approach, I have applied case study method. However, I have also critically looked at Yin's perspective (Yin, 2011) he stated that being focused on evaluation case studies are mostly used as case studies are a design of inquiry where a researcher can create an in-depth analysis of a case time and again for a program, activity, process. Similarly, Robson (2002) highlights that among different case types of case studies or organizational or institutional case study also occupies important space in qualitative research (as cited in Cohen et al., 2013). Moreover, case studies can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis (Yin, 2011).

I chose a case study as the preferred research approach. This approach incorporates diverse sources of information that are inherently contextual in nature (Creswell, 2014). The case study enables us to explore in major topics that are difficult to cover with application of other methods as it is widely acknowledged as being particularly suitable for qualitative research as a result of its preeminent advantage, namely the thorough in-depth study of complex matters (Bhatta, 2018). My justification for exploring in case study method lied in the ground that my questions are predominantly descriptive as my research questions aim finding a first-hand interpretation of engagement experiences and understanding of stakeholders in educational planning process with their contribution to create new forms of understanding.

Simons (1996, as cited in Cohen et al. 2013) has argued that case study needs to recognize the contribution that genuine creative encounter can make to new forms of understanding education, and it promotes free the mind of traditional analysis. In the case study research methodology is intended to undertake an in-depth exploration of a particular theme, programme, policy, organization, event, or activity transpiring within society. Since there is no absolute sampling method for qualitative research, I selected purposive sampling which is based on the context and purpose and interest of the researcher (Palys, 2008). I have applied the interpretive inquiry under the qualitative approach as a selection of research methods to study the engagement and status of participation on the same way, I have applied the case study method to explore the understandings and experiences of related stakeholder and their engagement in formulating the educational planning in local governments and their contribution in improving the education.

I have also tried to research a case to resolve significant challenges and concerns for stakeholders in educational planning in Local government. This method supported me to listen to the experiences and understanding of participants through interaction and discourse with them. My preferred source of gathering information were mainly through in-depth interviews, along with document reviews such as periodic plan and annual plans of local government. The case study is useful to gain understanding if we have planned to capture insight and understanding of a particular phenomenon or situation (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The interpretive research paradigm seeks an understanding of behaviour, explains actions from the participants' perspective, and respects the participants. For this, I carried out in-depth interviews, observations, documents review and so on.

I have also blended my experiences and observations while generating meaning and presenting arguments. Sileyew (2019) describe research methodology as the procedure by which researchers generate their problems and objectives, collect information and data, and submits their results by analysing the information and data acquired from the research area. Moreover, the methodology guides a researcher to generate a crystal clear understanding of the rationale and process of using the method (Flick, 2011). I have also taken into consideration of the six-phases case study process, as it enriches by incorporating further directions from the broader methodological literature (Baskarada, 2014). The six phases are: (1) Plan (2) Design (3) Prepare (4) Collect (5) Analyse (6) Share.

Furthermore, I have developed a case from two best municipalities form the Lumbini province, that has examined cases regarding educational planning at local governments precisely after the federalism in Nepal to the present situation that was brought up with the existing practice of my research participants. I took two rounds of interviews with a total of eight personnel and completed the field work according to the tools with stakeholders until my information saturation was reached. Each round of interview lasted for about 45 minutes to one hour. While taking interviews with my participants I was much conscious about their non-verbal expressions as well, such as body language, facial expressions and gestures; tones and intensity of voices, etc. These all processes helped me to capture the emotions that the participants showed while answering to my queries. Indeed, this was the beauty of a qualitative study (Yin, 2011).

Additionally, I made close observations of the ongoing activities of the selected municipalities. While observing local activities, I particularly focused on the physical infrastructures, local level working environment, local community stakeholders visit to the municipalities, information displays and so on. The field study was accomplished during the month of November and December, 2022.

Accordingly, the documents review included primarily the concerned municipalities periodic plans, sectoral plans, educational related documents and other internal publications such as newsletters, bulletins and souvenirs etc.

Research Location and Participants

In this study, I select 4 participants each from two municipalities of Lumbini Province using purposive sampling in order to accomplish my research purpose as highlighted by Abubakar and Abdullah (2008) that the participants selected this way will answer the research questions in the best way in qualitative research. After restructuring the governance system from unitary to federal in 2015 web-based Local Government Institutional Capacity Self-Assessment (LISA) system has been introduced as an innovative tool to track the performance of local governments that help Local Government to be more efficient, transparent, and accountable. The “LISA guideline 2020” envisages a continuous assessment mechanism to improve the overall performance of Local Governments (NPC, 2022). Within the jurisdiction absolute rights, local governments have authority to generate local revenue, formulate their own laws, plans and programs, and implement them.

This tool provides a check-list to the local governments through which they can evaluate different components of the local government's functions, including governance systems and procedures, administrative mechanisms, as well as fiscal systems and service delivery systems (MoFAGA, 2019). Participatory approach of assessment has been applied, which ensures rigorous discussion among employees and elected representatives. It should be carried out in an annual basis by the local governments. The result of LISA should be approved by board of executives and endorsed by the local assembly and made published. There is the provision of quality assurance to be administrated from Federal Government. There are 100 indicators from ten different broad areas including: Governance, Organization and Administration, Annual Planning and Budgeting, Financial Management, Service Delivery Mechanism, Judicial work performance, Physical Infrastructure Development, Gender Equity and Social Inclusion, Environment Protection and Disaster Management, Coordination and Collaboration (MoFAGA, 2020). The participants were from the best municipalities regarding the two consecutive scores of LISA for the years 2019/20- 2020/21(MoFAGA, 2022).

I select them in the sense that due to the best municipalities as indicated by the LISA, after 2017 the first phase of elected-led representative local governments practices in education planning will benefit in creating the knowledge and understanding of the planning process at local governments rather than choosing the weaker municipalities. Therefore, I selected local governments by analyzing the self-assessment done by the Local government score out of 100 indicators, the best score Local Governments with the variation in Sub metropolitan, Metropolitan, and Rural Municipalities. Among them, the two cases were selected among the best local governments located in the hilly and terai regions from Lumbini province.

Among these local governments, I communicated with the elected representatives and key actors as stakeholders having municipal authority of the first tenure (2017-2021/22) after the federalism in Nepal to participate in my research. Since, these municipal authorities are provided with the authority to imply the structures provided by the Local Government Operation Act, 2017 in preparing local-level planning such as periodic plans, MTEF, annual planning and budgeting, and sectoral plans including education plans. In this research, I have brought the local government practices and municipal authorities' perspectives as stakeholders to foster inclusive participatory planning while developing the education plan of local

government. Therefore, my participants were related key personnel's referred to research questions (Mayor/chairperson, Deputy -Mayor/vice chairperson, Education/Planning officers) engaged in planning process themselves and share their experience with related stakeholder's as a primary source of information.

In addition to the participants, I have also focused on document analysis as educational laws, act, periodic and annual plans as my secondary sources. Then, I conducted a meeting with the local governments located at hilly and terai regions from support of one of my research assistant who was living nearby the municipality and was familiar with the municipality elected representatives and government officials. A short introduction between us was a significant moment for me for building rapport and sharing research objectives. We introduced ourselves at the beginning of the conversation. Meanwhile, I shared my purpose for the meeting with my participants. Also, I shared my research topic along with the purpose of the research. The discussion encouraged me to furthering the tasks. They agreed to support providing the information required for this research.

Field Engagement and Meaning Making Process

The qualitative research action comprises information collection as initial field action that assists to collect stories of participants based on their experience and understanding. For collecting the information and relevant data, I carried out in-depth interviews with the selected participants. Likewise, I reviewed the relevant documents (annual plans, reports and bulletin, educational acts /guideline other records) of local governments for collecting required information and data about the selected local governments.

Before taking the interview, I identified the participants in support of planning officer considering the requirement of my research. Then, I communicated with the selected participants to ensure their adequate response. Similarly, I conducted a face-to-face meeting. Also, I communicated with all concerned people through the telephone for rapport building. Sharing purpose of the research was a great step to be closer with the participants. I carried out a series of meetings and communications with them to take consent for further discussion and requested for sharing their experiences based on temporality, place and sociability. As suggested by Schutt (2009) that the participants are to be respected and their time to be valued, I treated the participants in the same way. I met with them as per their convenient time and venue. I noted their experiences as they shared during the in-depth interviews. This

process of gathering information was continued till I got the rich information through a different medium: in-depth interview, observation, and document review. In the beginning and end of every discussion with the participants, I noticed them about the purpose and pattern of using data and how I would maintain confidentiality and follow the ethics. Also, I had consulted them to use the shared information and data as part of the research.

After collecting the required information and data which includes field notes, audio records, observation notes, and data about the educational planning process in local government, I prepared field notes. I transcribed the data, and made meaning. Further, I asked relevant questions collecting relevant documents for constructive narratives regarding their participation in educational planning.

While making meaning, I reduced the amount of raw information shifting trivia from the significance information, I identified the appropriate pattern, constructed a framework and interpret the key findings and meanings of the narratives (Patton, 2002). As a qualitative researcher, I started the analysis of information and data from the beginning as a regular process till finalizing report of the research (Flick, 2011). Further, I developed the theme based on the information collected after transcribing and coding in line with the research questions based on the theoretical perspective applied in this research.

Then, I analyzed the information acquired and data collected from the field and finally constructed new knowledge about the engagement of related stakeholders in educational planning using the theory of participation and Giddens's Structural theory. Based on the knowledge generated, I presented the conclusion and its implications.

My Approach to Maintain Trustworthiness

I have made a best effort to maintain the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. I have tried to make my study transparent, methodical and adhering to evidence. Before the interview, the respondents were assured of their confidentiality through verbal consent. The participants' confidentiality and anonymous treatment were very much considered. Pseudonyms for all the related stakeholders and municipalities are used to protect the identities and confidentiality of the participants.

Conversely, I am aware that the participants’ right to be recognized with any publication of my original work, unless they wished in some contexts where the participants themselves wish to be so identified. As a researcher, I tried to ensure

'credibility' through analyzing information and data as intended by the research (Sandouk 2015; Shenton, 2004). Moreover, (Saunders et al., 2009) describe axiology as it concerns the role that a researcher's values play at all the stages of research actions that assist the research to be credible and trustworthy. I have maintained credibility by ensuring the prolonged engagement in the fieldwork, persistent observation of the participant at the respective local governments, interviews with participants and alignment with my professional experience. Further, I reviewed relevant documents of local governments precise to education and literature related to my research for ensuring the credibility of the findings of the research.

The next way to maintain the trustworthiness of my research is transferability'. which shows if the findings of the research are applicable in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For getting transferability, I wrote down descriptions of meaning made from information and data obtained from the source of information which can be transferred to other contexts (Bryman, 2008). Careful interpretation of information was made to generate meaning-making. In doing so, evidence generated from this type of study has been considered credible and robust. As pointed out by Heyett et al. (2014), I have illustrated rigor by appropriate explanations of the methodological foundations, including paradigm and theoretical viewpoints that inspired my design of the research, to preserve the integrity of the case study.

Ethical Consideration of My Research

Ethical research in education is a moral rather than administrative meeting before the interview with the related stakeholders and the participants were arranged first to explain the purpose of the research and get consent for their participation. This research has taken every required steps to confirm that every participant in the research understands the cycle in which they were to be engaged, so that they knew how much their participation is important. This research has treated participants with their approval and respect to them so that will be fully agreed that they could draw out without mentioning the reason whatsoever, from the research. In conducting this research, I was sensitive to the religious, gender and cultural differences of the targeted stakeholders in Local government. This research has maintained the confidentiality of identity and information and the accuracy of information shared by the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In conducting this research, the consent of the participants was taken and respected their freedom of taking part and withdraw

their consent. Also, I was cautious with the confidentiality of participants' identities and information.

While starting fieldwork, the researcher clarified my objectives and research purpose approved by the university to the local government to facilitate its members' consent. The researcher requested all the participants for consensus building before starting the discussion. The researcher pledged to maintaining confidentiality of the information they shared during conversation. They granted consent for in-depth interview and discussions as required. The researcher commitment to keep the information confidential enhanced their volunteer engagement with self- dignity. To maintain the confidentiality, the researcher used pseudonyms of participants and the name of local governments and other identities were also prevented from being unethically exposed. The researcher fixed the venue of the interview as per the interest of participants where they felt comfortable (e.g. at offices, at home etc.). Further, the researcher did not react unusually while they responded emotionally and behaved adversely during the discussion.

Concluding the Chapter

This chapter discussed the research paradigm, approach, and methodologies. I explained in detail about the research location and participants. I opened the chapter with an interpretive research paradigm. Then, I presented my ontological stance as relative realism where I could assume reality is contextual, subjective, and multiple. I presented my epistemological and axiological stance as nature of the study. Further, I made detailed explanations on how I applied interpretive case study design as the methodology of the research.

The most important section of this chapter is the selection of location, participants and source of information. This section elucidated the hilly and terai regions of Lumbini province as the research area where two municipalities from each region were considered as the source of information or research units. This chapter includes details of my field engagement (collecting data and information) and the meaning-making process which entails information on how I maintained the research quality and ethical aspect.

CHAPTER IV
UNDERSTANDING OF EDUCATIONAL PLAN AT LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

This chapter presents the findings and meaning making about the information collected from the field related to the understanding and experiences of key actors of the local governments in educational planning. It responds to the first question of the research. This includes the four different themes, which I have developed based on the information collected from the field; 1) Practices of legal provisions for educational planning, 2) Setting the priorities of local needs in education, 3) Implementing the education planning process in local governments, 4) Quality assurance in education planning process.

Practices of Legal Provisions for Educational Planning

The legal provisions play an important role in the formation of plans in Local Governments. During my conversations with Mayor 1of the municipality, I put forward my concerns about the practices in formulating an educational plan in his/her local government, along with his/her overall leadership role. Moreover, Mayor 1 as being the coordinator of the municipal education committee he has to coordinate with the School Management Committee(SMC), Parents Teacher Association(PTA), teachers for and citizens of communities. Regarding this Mayor of municipality 1 said that,

To be honest, I would like to speak frankly with you regarding the educational planning at local governments. We have followed the legal provisions of the Local Government Act 2017 and the responsibilities stated in Educational Policy 2019 more on paper than on the ground.

From the conversation with the Mayor , It is understood that the structure and legal provisions that are provided by the constitutions, law acts for local governments in planning difficult in implementing due to many reasons such as lack of knowledge or conflicting interests. In such cases, citizens need to hold their elected officials accountable and demand transparency and accountability in the decision-making process. Moreover, Mayor of municipality 1 further said that,

Since I am the coordinator of the Municipal Education Committee, my colleagues think that I am responsible for all decision making, so they always ask me

to present plans directly from the pockets, rather than having to present them in front of the committee for their significance. As directed by the acts and policies, I have concern for marginalized members, but I was unable to follow the process and ensure it.

From this expression of the mayor of municipality 1, It is understood that the level of participation is tokenism level as the stakeholders keep their voices to the power holders as the mayor which is agency dominant due to his severity in formulating educational plans. Moreover, the municipal level education committees under the lead role of Mayor have important role in educational planning. The marginalized community members rely on the head of municipalities as they do not believe the participation process in planning of local level.

The deputy mayor of municipality 2 expressed her past experience as,

For the last 20 years the local level stands without elected representatives. After, 2017 elected representative's presence have generated hopes in citizen for their rights will be address locally by legal acts and guideline. However, in struggling to draft related laws act for our municipality, we have felt difficulties in fulfilling the citizen's expectation as expected. However, we have made a significant difference in our education through formulating education plan in participatory way and implementing it in effective manner. We have prepared five years' education plan.

From the expressions and reflection of the deputy mayor, it is evident that she is deeply interested in implementation of the laws and acts prepared by the local government. Moreover, the participation was given emphasis by her which shows that there is mechanism to imply the constitution mandate rights while preparing the plan. Moreover, this municipality have prepared five years' education plan applied in education sector in annual plan. This shows that the higher level of participation exists where the stakeholders as an agency is active in implementation of the plan in participatory way.

Planning officer of the municipality 1 highlighted the most important rights provided to the Local Government. He expressed his experience in the following way,

> *The constitution has also provided many rights, among which sub-section (4) of article (57), sub-section (2) of the article (214, 221) and section (2) where in schedule 8 single rights of the local level, the entire responsibility of basic and secondary education has been given to the local level. However, as a*

local government we cannot fulfill the aspiration of local community in education due to lack of resource.

The perception of the planning officer indicates that the practice of planning is directed by the law and responsibilities indicated by the constitution and local laws and Acts. In addition, all the executive power of the local level belongs to the village executive or city executive (MoFAGA, 2019). This shows that the legal provisions for educational planning at Local Governments agency dominated the superiority of higher-level officials in making the plans. However, it is understood from the conversation of the participants that participation has been influenced by the structuration such as the structures at local government, committees involved. Here the level of participation is as tokenism level as the stakeholders keep their voices to the power holders as a mayor which is an agency dominant due to his severity in formulating educational plans.

Setting The Priorities of Local Needs in Education

Article 31 of the Constitution of Nepal 2015 establishes education as a fundamental right and ensures that education up to secondary level is free. In order to implement this provision, Schedule-8 of the Constitution has given the governing and managerial authority of education to the local level. Local Government Operation Act 2017 transferred the authority of basic and secondary level education to the local level, the education sector programs are being implemented through the local level. Regarding how the priorities in planning focus to education are established is a prominent question for the effective service delivery and implementation and execution of the plans. The planning officer of municipality 1 summarizes his experience as,

I am clear that the priorities should come from a participatory level including community needs. We are prioritizing the local needs of education by interacting in community level with education aware personalities. Moreover, the constitution has given full authority to the Local Government in education and its planning up to secondary level. However, as a planning officer I am more engaged in the implementation of the plan rather than prioritizing it.

He expressed his reflection and understanding about the local government educational plan. It is understood that in formulating the education sector plans stakeholders took interest less rather than the executing the plans. This clearly shows

the relation between structure as local government and agency as participants. Due to the agency the structure has been affected and participation here is not linear.

Education priorities were not on the core agenda as mayor were busy in learning and formulating the local laws after the first election in 2017. Regarding the issues Mayor 1 of Municipality 1 highlighted the issues as,

> *As the mayor of the municipality, I have to wait around 90 days to receive Local Government Operation Act 2017.Moreover, only from the laws and act, without proper planning and budgeting I was unable to fulfill responsibility for secondary education in my tenure. We were busy at making laws and drafting the guidelines which was not prioritized by the province and federal government. So due to lack of appropriate guidelines and priorities education was in overshadowed. We were more focused on constructing roads and infrastructure which was also citizen's priorities at that time.*

From the expression and reflection of the mayor 1, it is evident that he is engaged in making laws and acts rather than the education plan. Moreover, to implement the structure provided by the constitution the first phase after the elected led representatives have to be engaged more in process of coordination and making the acts aligned with provincial and federal government. Education plan was less prioritizing as the focus of the citizen, community and the mayor himself was on the road and infrastructure construction. So, education was not the priority of local government in the municipality.

Further, the education head of the municipality 2 about the education priorities expressed his experiences as,

> *We consult with related stakeholders and followed the steps of planning for the particular year aligned with the five years' education plan. All the steps from root level have been followed. We have thoroughly consult with the teachers, Parents teacher associations (PTA) and School Management Committee (SMC) members, local political party members and related other stakeholders for setting the education priorities. We have prioritized education by developing education plans, local curriculum, organize seminars for education plan etc.*

The education head of municipality 2 expressed his understanding educational planning as the participatory approach in following the seven steps planning. Education priorities is such understand performing the innovative activities as

authorized by the acts and laws. The involvement of the stakeholders has increase their confidence to meet the citizen expectation but there is a room for more to go for more effective participation and education planning.

I asked the planning officer 2 of municipality as how the indicators were set while prioritizing the education in local government. The planning officer of municipality 2 expressed his views as,

> We asked ourselves, *what are our concerns in educations? we asked to ourselves. What do we need to deliver? what are the things to be settled in the current year? What are the things we need to plan for infrastructure and quality of education? We focused on the issues and collected the information at different levels then we prioritized the education priorities in the local government. As, our school performance in quality measures form federal government became the best schools all over in Nepal.*

From the expression of the planning officer, I understood that the process of conducting a need assessment at the local level in education encompasses the systematic acquisition and analysis of pertinent information for educational needs and expectation in local level. Moreover, the purpose and scope of the needs assessment should be clearly identified in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evaluation's intended objective. It is imperative to identify the specific information to be collected and the objectives to be attained through the evaluation procedure at local level. So need assessment and making the education priority by the stakeholders fosters the education plan of municipality.

The deputy Mayor of municipality 1 highlighted some of the priorities in education sector during her tenure as,

> *We prioritize what we see lacking in schools. As a woman, I am more sensitive to the girl's education program. Upon the visit to school visit we found that due to the mensuration problem girls were unable to attend school regularly. We manage to distribute the free sanitary pads in school. This has significantly improved the girl's education. Moreover, we prioritize on ICT materials and provide laptop to all the teachers for enhancing the quality education through technology.*

The perception of the mayor 1 indicates that the local need to be prioritize as a head of local government. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the target population is crucial for developing a highly informed needs assessment that

accurately reflects the issues at hand. Promoting ICT materials and capacitated the teacher's fosters quality education which is a good initiative of the local government. This gives the outline that the stakeholders should be active in addressing the local needs related to education and more priority are given to make education more inclusive.

Deputy Mayor 2 of the Municipality further expressed her experience about the that,

> *I have always prioritized education in first number then the other thematic areas as health in second, employment in third, agriculture and tourism in fourth and industries and business in fifth priority in my tenure. This shows my priority and dedication towards education. A part form members of committee, I promote marginalized community to come up with their problems. I have interacted with the local stakeholders including the marginalized community members so that our municipality is one of the best municipality in terms of education. However, Large amount of the resources was invested in promoting online teaching is during Covid 19.*

The aforementioned expression from the mayor 2 clearly mentioned the priority in education as the first space that includes initiatives for professional advancement and favorable working environments with the active citizen participation. This shows that if there is active citizen participation and active role of agency as the stakeholder's education plan is always a priority of local governments.

Implementing the Education Planning Process in Local Governments

In this section, I have included the participant's voices regarding the implementing practices of the educational plan in local governments. They have shaped different laws, approaches, and controls and have so distant assessed the suggestions of their arrangements and plans and the result of their five years' tenure.

Mayor 1 of Municipality 1 have a very beginning experience for started new planning for the development of its locality with citizens' participation. He further expressed the practice of local government as,

> *Local planning has followed constitutional, legal and democratic norms and values for Local planning. Since we have practice in new structures with peoples' new mandates after first local government in 2017. We identified their problems, needs and gave priority to the construction of roads,*

management of drinking water, tourism development, good governance, education sector and health sector, etc. All development activities are carried out based on the planning of each and every ward and tole, where peoples' needs and demands are collected in general meetings in peoples' participation, and sent to the ward assembly. The ward committee manages the ward general assembly with peoples' participation and after extensive discussion selects the plans based on priority and urgency, and then sends them to the municipality assembly for final approval. When the municipality assembly approves the plans, they are implemented. Proper planning and implementation of plans is crucial for the development of municipality as well as for welfare of the people.

The perception of the mayor 1 has emphasis that the local government elected representatives after 2017 were busy in making the acts and guidelines for the initial preparation of executing the education plan. The active involvement and participation of the local community holds paramount importance in establishing priorities for education. Local governing authorities are interested and clearly understand there is a need to engage parents, educators, learners, and community representatives in the formulation of educational policies and resolutions. This collaboration engenders a feeling of possessiveness and communal accountability towards education. However, there is barrier in effective implementation.

Deputy Mayor 2 of Municipality 1 further expressed the implementation mechanism of educational plans as,

The Local government is always responsible for and accountable to the Local people by guaranteeing good governance and by carrying out development activities properly. As Local government provides the local people with an opportunity to participate in the process of planning and decision making, it has an effect on the quality of education .Thus, the Local government promotes and strengthens quality education plan by inclusive participation and following each steps with related stakeholders.

From the expression and reflection of the deputy mayor 2, it is evident that she is deeply impressed by the prioritization of education necessitates the provision of equitable opportunities and access to high-quality education for every student, irrespective of their socio-economic status, abilities. As a stakeholder of Local governments efforts in diminishing the disparities in academic achievements through

the adoption of comprehensive policies, provision of assistance to underprivileged community enhance the quality of education.

> Education Head of Municipality 1 focused on the role of implementation as,
>
> *Local Government Operation Act has given 23 rights to the Local level government to the basic and secondary education related rights provided by the constitution. Under this right, provision of physical infrastructure of the school, economic, social and physical management, quality education, provision and management of human resources of the school, training of teachers, security, protection and management of property related to the school, permission, monitoring and management of schools teaching in the mother tongue, preparing local curriculum technical education. There are many subjects including vocational training planning, operation, permit, monitoring, evaluation and regulation.*

The perception of the education head has further proved that local governments establishing mechanisms aimed at monitoring the progress of educational initiatives and evaluating their efficacy in support with the rights provided by constitution for Local Governments. With reference to the provided data of education sectors such as teacher student ratio, need of local curriculum to address the local needs need to be implied in education of local level. I can generate the meaning that by implementing strategic initiatives, local authorities can allocate educational priorities and strive towards ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students.

Education head of Municipality 1 has come across insurmountable problems in implementing the educational plan. He further expressed as,

> *The ambitious program in planning created a problem in implementation. Moreover, still we are facing the problems of child friendly, disable friendly classrooms, there are inadequate rooms aligned with the number of students. However, in aspects to quality of education we have focused on capacity enhancement of the teachers and making the classrooms ICT equipped with children-friendly classrooms.*

He further explores the difficulties of implementation of an educational plan due to lack of transportation and resources separated for monitoring and evaluation of the program. Altogether we have 74 schools where 52 schools are community schools

and 22 schools are institutionalized schools to follow up and monitor the education program.

Planning officer of Municipality 2 expressed his views on implementing the plan related to education as,

> *For three years we have been able to implement our curriculum in our municipalities. We have tried to connect all the educational institutions (schools) as one integrated school perspectives with the indicators connecting the low performance schools with the best schools in our sub- metropolitan city. We have prioritized the quality of results so, implementing the plans related to education are monitored for quality delivery in education. Our schools are being independent in resources too. Schools in city areas have constructed building for commercial purpose so that they invested themselves in implementing our Local plans related to SIP (School Improvement Plan). However, the SIP are not submitted to us on time so the real ground of addressing the need is difficult.*

From the expression and reflection of the planning officer 2, it is clear that active involvement of local governments in curriculum design is highly recommended to guarantee its compatibility with the students' demands and conformance to the national education criteria. The improvement of education quality can be achieved through the implementation of innovative approaches and the integration of novel teaching methods, technological advancements, and practical skill development in the educational process. However, there is not properly implementation of School Improvement plan so that the monitoring of the school activities kept in education plan is difficult in implementation.

In the other municipality, deputy mayor 1 expressed about the School Management Committee's role to be more focused on quality education delivery rather than the construction of the building. She said,"

> *As SMC members and PTA members along with teachers are busy in construction works as SMC members as a "Upabhokta Samitee"(users group) is busy in construction works, there is an increased chance of the main agenda for quality education are given less priority. Moreover, the teacher's quality in delivering the lessons and use of ICT and developing other resources materials have hampered in engaging most of the time in construction of the building.*

The deputy mayor expressed her experience as the understanding of SMC is more focused on the infrastructure development in education sector rather than in quality of education as it is easy to measure the infrastructure than the quality of the education to the citizens as progress in the sector of education. This have hinder the education planning process in the real ground.

The above views expressed during the interview of the participant can be concluded as local government has ensured education as an important basic right of the citizens by assimilating the importance of education by trying to institutionalize the federal state system. In particular, the local level has the responsibility to promote, protect and fulfill the following rights related to education in the constitution but finds difficulties in proper implementation due to a lack of resources, proper planning, emergency cases and managing the teachers as per the level of students, infrastructures, quality education.

Quality Assurance in Education Planning Process

The educational debate at the local level is prominently rising mainly after the new political system, the rights have been decentralized. The first responsibility and duty of the local level is to manage the daily administrative work related to school education directed from planning process for effective implementation and quality assurance.

Assuring quality in the education planning process of school education is very challenging, as all local governments do not need to choose the same priority. Mayor 1 of Municipality 1

> [*Yo gunastariya shikshya ko marga sajilo chaina tara yo margama nahidi shukha chaina](The path to quality of education is not easy but there is no option for this). Moreover, he constitution of Nepal assigns many rights and responsibilities to the local level, lack of development of leadership, expertise, efficiency and capacity of the local level in the past, until now all the powers have been operated from the centre, lack of experience in exercising the rights and responsibilities locally, and the people's representatives as I as a first representative have more to exercise for quality education. It is very challenging to act according to the spirit of the constitution, to establish a system, to provide educational services from the local level, to develop educational quality. This can be done through the means of effective planning process related to education*.

From the expression of the deputy mayor, I understood that in order to ensure that schools and educational institutions operate in a lawful manner, it seems that work such as necessary legislation, directives, committee arrangements, cooperation and coordination, recruitment, approval, and supervision should be given equal priority. Stakeholders have tried a lot to maintain quality education in our planning process by giving priority for ICT materials and classroom, management of teachers, coordination with community, teachers and marginalized groups about addressing the issues of education from the community, ward to the municipality level. Deputy mayor of Municipality 1 expressed regarding quality education as,

> *Quality of education is directly in relation with the results. There is not such mechanism to verify the relation of quality with the results as we were busy in making education acts and other infrastructure priorities of the municipalities.*

After education has come under the authority of the local level, the responsibility and challenge of improving school education, which is always criticized for its quality, has been added along with the completion of village and municipal authority. The developing the infrastructure in the local municipalities were there priority so that the educational plan was focused related to infrastructure and understood the planning of education as developing the infrastructure such as school building and rooms rather than the methodologies and quality assurance of learning and delivering the education.

The education head of Municipality 1 put an argument in coping with the challenging issues about the ceiling of the budget for education for quality purpose expressed,

> *Quality education is a headache issue, no matter where the right to education is placed at the centre, state and local level. The rights of education, which are limited on paper, have been entrusted to the local level to take them to the implementation level. If the representatives elected by the people at the local level are to work effectively for the welfare of the people and for the development of that area, then keeping education as the first priority at the local level. Moreover, increment in quality education is not easily measured and seen. If we improve the class one education quality, it takes at least 10 years to replicate the results. But in road and infrastructure construction the output is seen as soon as it completed. So, assurance in quality in education is challenging in municipality.*

The perception of the education head has highlighted that in order to ensure the necessary financial resources for the quality issues in the planning process, the local government should start the work as soon as possible to reach an agreement with the federal and provinces government for the allocation of national resources. The stakeholders have the concept of building the infrastructure rather than the quality enhancement in education. However, the infrastructure is important in education for the effective learning environment but the local authority understand precisely to development infrastructure so that the progress made by the local level is more favourable to indicate the progress made in education sector.

Planning officer of Municipality 1 further expressed his views the in assurance of quality in educational planning is in its implementation. He said that,

> *We followed all the seven steps of planning from the community level to municipal level including all the sectorial committees and other municipal education committees for the educational plan. But when there is a time of implementation due to lack of resources the plan of quality enhancement is lag behind.*

The implementation of educational plans at the local level can be hindered by various obstacles that may vary contingent upon the particular structure of local government. Upon the conversation with the planning officer, insufficiency of fiscal resources can impede the execution of educational plan at the community level. Insufficient financial resources have the potential to hinder the accessibility of necessary infrastructure, educational aids, technologies, and provisions which are crucial for delivering education that meets the benchmark of excellence regarding the implementation of education. This shows the failure of plan in relating the resources of local government.

Planning officer of Municipality 2 expressed his views regarding the coordination of School Improvement Plan (SIP) and Annual Planning and budgeting as,

> *There is not much coordination in between the school improvement plan and annual planning of municipalities as it affects on implementation of the educational plan in the municipalities. As SIP should be made by the school itself and have to be submitted to municipalities for further perusal. moreover, the policies envisioned to establish Municipal Education Committee (MEC)/ Rural Municipal Education Committee (RMEC), Ward Coordination*

Committee (WCC), School Management Committee (SMC) and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) as mechanisms to support for the effective implementation of quality education. However, I found they are interested on their own benefits rather than to support the local authority in enhancing the quality education aspects. This may be due to their lack of capacity in the planning process that should align the targets and indicators with national standard.

In communication with the planning officer I understood that the committees related to education sector related to community such as SMC and PTA have been found to significantly lack the successful implementation of educational plans due to inadequate access to fundamental amenities, have been shown to produce unfavourable effects on the effectiveness of educational strategies. Moreover, these communities are interested in their own benefits means the actual local needs of the local community did not get enough attention in educational plan. Successful execution of educational plans requires collaboration among different partners, including government authorities, teachers, guardians, and community individuals. When there's a need of coordination and collaboration among these partners, it gets to be troublesome to adjust efforts and assets towards the common objective of moving forward in education plan. This refers that the participation level is lower when the stakeholders are inactive. Education Head of Municipality 1 expressed his views as,

We give priority to the assured program and budget as conditional grant as this is easy to apply. For example, if the budget head is to build a library for the sum of six lakhs rupees it is easy to implement but due to lack of resources and revenue generation our municipality is less for basic service delivery for our beneficiaries (citizens). Furthermore, the international commitments as Sustainable Development Agenda (SDG), Quality and Inclusive Education no 4, we do not possess the strong background to link the education plan with its indicators. We know the local needs, still there is a challenges to address SDG4, related to educational in the planning process. This is happening due to lack of expertise and providing fewer priorities in planning process.

In preparing the educational plan, this should be harmonized with national laws, policy, (Sustainable Development Goals, 4) SDG4 targets, plan without neglecting the local needs. With interviewed taken about the quality issues, this has given low priority due to lack of allocation of budgets, capacity to formulate the

planning link local needs with national priorities, lack of revenue generation, and compulsory focus on conditional grants for federal and provincial governments. When the local level formulated planning related to education, it is important to reach school-age children within the village municipality or municipal service area, sustainability or continuity of children enrolled in schools, increase or improve the quality of learning, improve educational management and develop a sense of community participation and belonging.

Concluding the Chapter

This chapter explored the understanding and experiences of the research participants regarding educational planning processes in their municipalities. Their responses on understanding local level education planning processes brought four major themes including: practices of legal provisions for educational planning, setting the priorities of local needs in education, implementing the education planning process in local governments and quality assurance. The findings suggest that the key actors of local governments are well aware about the legal provisions and structural arrangements made for local level planning process, including education sector. However, in implementation of these legal provisions they faced several limitations. Similarly, due to unlimited priorities of the local stakeholders they are having impediments in giving realistic priority in their plans and programs which are also affecting the implementation and quality assurance parts of the educational governance.

CHAPTER V
ENGAGEMENT OF STAKEHOLDER IN EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

After the discussion about the understanding and experience of educational plans formulated by the local governments in Chapter IV, this chapter presents my findings and analysis in response to my second research question, "How do stakeholders engage in educational planning? I have presented the findings related to stakeholder engagement in the educational planning of local governments. In this chapter, I have discussed this question related to the field information. I have interpreted the information for making the meaning that includes the four sections. The first section is about stakeholder's engagement in educational planning while the second is about stakeholder's capacity in education planning. The third section is about participatory budgeting and program formulation. The fourth section is about establishing social accountability through educational planning.

Stakeholders Engagement in Education Planning

The participatory planning and budgeting process at the local level energizes citizens to take part within the determination, usage, and administration of improvement plans. As a result of these dynamic arrangements and the follow-up of the seven-step arranging handle, with related partners with the agents of the marginalized communities in planning. This section explores the engagement of stakeholders in educational planning.

Local-level planning is a fundamentally portion of the method of satisfying their orders. Local Government Operation Act (LGOA) 2017 has given the command to define yearly, periodic, strategic and sectoral improvement plans (including educational plans) for local advancement.

The Mayor of municipality 2 lamented that,

> *I am aware that every citizen shall have the right to get compulsory and free education up to the basic level and free education up to the secondary level from the Local Government. We are engaged in educational planning as the responsibility of Local Government to enrich the standard of education addressing the Local demands. The municipal education committee is active where I lead the committee. I have tried to follow all the process and covering the all the stakeholders related to education sector in my municipality.*

> *Moreover, I am more focused on overall planning of the municipality, however as the head of municipal education committee the need base plan of basic education to secondary education including technical and vocational education, planning program formulation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and regulation and basic school permit, approval, management and regulation and implementation of local curriculum. In doing so myself is aware of mobilizing all the committees, PTA, SMC and head teachers, and education section for the engagement of education planning.*

This expression has further proved that the development of an efficient educational plan in a participatory way necessitates the involvement of diverse stakeholders, comprising students, parents, and members of the community. By engaging all relevant stakeholders in the planning process, the plan can effectively address their individual requirements, desires, and apprehensions. Moreover, the identification of pertinent stakeholders in community is important who can contribute to the planning process.

The Mayor of Municipality 1 has a bit different experience being engaged in the planning process,

> *I was also the coordinator of SMC for three years. I found that the planning process is not followed as they believe that the mayor himself is all in all. So they bring the activities at the last hour before submitting them to the municipal executive committee So, the seven steps of planning are not properly followed in making the educational plans. Due to the access of different media and YouTube, communities, parents and teachers are coming up with innovative ideas that could not be addressed by municipality due to lack of capacity and resources.*

The fundamental element for a successful participatory educational plan involves promoting collaboration, acknowledging diverse perspectives, and guaranteeing consistent stakeholder involvement during the plan's development, execution, and assessment phases. However, from the expression and reflection of the mayor 1, it is clearly understood that stakeholders like mayor have not generate the importance of participatory planning. He acts himself as a superiority person so that the local community and citizens were not interested in the structural and process of planning. This shows that the planning made in this municipality is weaker as the

lower level of participation is observed due to the inactiveness of the agency (stakeholders like mayor) in planning process.

The Planning officer of Municipality 2 about the engagement in the planning process expressed,

> *Issues such as free and compulsory education, equity strategy to address excluded children and safe schools are always my lobby for the educational planning. I have always argued for the meaningful participation of the SMC for planning, management, and monitoring. However, they are interested in more for the user committee role for the development of the infrastructure of the building rather than the input for quality of education.*

The perception of the planning officer 2 is that the integration of participatory planning is a crucial component in the development of effective educational plans at the local level. The decision-making process for effective plan that reflects the needs, aspirations and priorities of the local community entails the active participation of various stakeholders, including teachers, parents, students, community members, and education officials. Participatory planning holds significant importance in the development of effective educational plans. Deputy Mayor 2 further expressed that,

> *Our municipality emphasizes the participation of the stakeholders in planning process. I have participated in facilitating the plan from the community level. The infrastructure of the school building attracts mostly attention of the school management committee but found that voices raised for quality education is lower due to several reasons such as limited source and needed capacities for education in stakeholders.*

Participatory planning is a continuous and dynamic procedure that facilitates the provision of ongoing feedback, observation, and assessment of the academic plan. The involvement of community stakeholders in the implementation of the plan can yield valuable insights and feedback, enabling gradual modifications and enhancements over a period of time that makes significant contribution towards the efficacy and durability of the educational plan. However, the challenges faced by the education plan in local level is due to the lack of resources separated for education sector.

Deputy Mayor 1 of Municipality 1 expressed her contribution in the following way,

> *In the educational planning process during my tenure, I have always focused on the quality education and the welfare of teacher and students. We have introduced girl's education programs that have been neglected in access of education due to financial lacking of their family for education. In addition to this, we provide them with scholarships and text books, we construct the male and female toilets and lunch the free sanitary distribution program so to increase the participation, distributed laptops for teachers where we include this in education planning with the consultation of marginalized community in raising the voices have made significant changes in the education process. Moreover, due to the structure of the responsibility I have not more engaged in the municipal education committee as I have more to be engaged in other committees as well. I have found that the municipal education committee is more focused on the implementation of the program activities already planned rather than formulating the participatory planning process in education planning.*

From the conversation of deputy mayor 1, I understood that participatory planning facilitates and fosters partnerships and synergies among related stakeholders. Collaboratively, participants have the opportunity to exchange ideas, and leverage their expertise, thereby facilitating innovative ideas in educational planning. So, participating in educational plan plays a pivotal role in incubating trust and fortifying partnerships amidst diverse stakeholders, thereby serving as a motivation for sustainable educational plan. However, due to the structured committee and defined stakeholders in local level, capable personalities may deprive from providing the inputs and implementing the plan in more effective way.

Head of the education section 1 of the municipality one said,

> *I coordinate with the related stakeholders of the education heads, principle, PTA, SMC, in meetings held by municipalities. From them we know the what are the necessities related to education. We collect these issues and with leadership role of our Mayor we transform them to the planning activities under education department. In the process of seven steps planning process I have always thought of the role and steps of teachers of school, how they will support so that the effective plans are formed for realistic change in education. In addition to this, after the Local Government gets responsible for education of basic and secondary education we are very busy at the*

administrative role and we have no time for the supervision, implementation discuss going to the schools. Today structures (after 2017) in education have shrunk our responsibilities to monitor, interact and make plans with discussion with school's teachers and students. One of the other barrier is the lack of resources in the education section.

Upon the conversation with the participants, I understood that encouraging active participation from all stakeholders can address the educational needs of their communities are addressed and that resources are allocated effectively. Here the level of participation is as tokenism level as the stakeholders keep their voices to the power holders as the mayor which is agency dominant due to his severity in formulating educational plans. Though the policy has a beautiful provision for the planning provision of education at basic and secondary level, it has not yet been fully implemented. Parents and SMC members believe that the final decision-making is from Mayor so that the planning topics are directly handover to the mayor for making the educational plans in the municipality The engagement in seven steps planning process is valid only in the paper not in practice. Moreover, participation as a tokenism has been influenced by structuration.

Stakeholders capacity in Education Planning

Planning is an efficient process of technical and political considering approximately planning objectives and missions, defining methodologies and destinations, and executing advancement activities. It involves certain components such as assets, innovation, and concepts that maximize the peoples' needs such as framework development, socio-economic well-being and most vitally the governance framework of the administering educate. The planning prepare has been implanted with the individuals and places basically in creating nations to engage the individuals in decision-making, asset assignment, and extend usage so that genuine needs and requests can be created to carry out improvement activities (Cilliers, & Timmermans, 2014). In this section, I have put forward the responses regarding the question related to the capacity of the stakeholders in planning to my participants.

[*Yojana banaune kura jatil bisaya rahecha, hamro vigyatale matra nabhayune rahecaha]. "*Drafting the plan is a complex process and only from our expertise it is incomplete" - Education Section Head of Municipality 1.

Education Section Head 1 of Municipality 1 expressed his views as,

Drafting the plan with the indicators and targets is a difficult process. Our expertise in the education section with few officials only could not prioritize the planning proposals. I have found this expertise also lacking in the elected representatives. So we need to hire the expertise for the purpose. In making the municipal education plan we hire the expertise so that we expect that this will represent the real scenario of the education plan for our municipality.

With the education section head 1, I understood that expertise role of stakeholders in local government engage in partnerships with educational professionals, involve the community and relevant stakeholders, and allocate resources towards continual professional development for stakeholders. The prioritization of the construction of a robust and proficient team is crucial in ensuring the development of effective educational plans that cater to the requirements of both local governments and the community. In contrast, due to lack of expertise the educational plan is weaker that also limited the participation in implementation process.

Mayor 1 of Municipality expressed he views in capacity for the planning as,

The planning is technical process to be followed the steps of planning with alignment with the federal and provincial guidelines and commitments, the municipal sectoral committees have less competency in relating the targets and actual need of the Local communities.

The mayor 1 as expressed his experience can be interpreted that inadequately designed educational plan creates gap in academic achievement among diverse student cohorts. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds or marginalized communities may be particularly affected if their specific needs and challenges are not adequately addressed in the plan. The potential impact of an inadequately designed plan on the needs and challenges of students from disadvantaged backgrounds or marginalized communities have chance to be included in education. Deputy Mayor 1 expressed her experience as,

We as a lead role in the budgeting and planning formulation committee, we must increase our capacity, skills and habit for learning so that planning and budgeting at the local level are realistic, inclusive and more appropriate for addressing local needs and expectations. Due to the engagement in many committees, we have less chance to deeply understand the national and international commitments that should align with the local priorities.

From the conversation of deputy mayor 1, I understood that the education plan need to address the local needs of the education in municipality. By this, the education plan can contribute the effective results in the applied ground. As, the participation of the related stakeholders is stronger there is a high chance to be implementing the education plan in municipality. This shows that, the weak performance of agency affects in participation and hinders in preparing the effective educational plan. Planning officer 1 of Municipality said,

> *Education can be improved only with the support of parents and the desire of students. Stating that the quality of the school can be strengthened only with the contribution of the staff and teachers, the Local Governments will be only the facilitators. Moreover, it is more challenging to run the education section only the resources (finance and human) by the Local Governments. Due to lack of human resources, we do not sufficiently monitor and take part in planning process of education. On the other hand, we do not have vehicle for education section to monitor the program. This have created us the more problem. The computer has been provided to the teachers, but the lack of optimum use of computers is being only to display the teachings materials and cannot be used for research and other competencies. So, there should be training to them about the national and Local needs of education in ICT.*

Allocation of resources can prove to be challenging in the absence of appropriate expertise. This can lead to a mismanagement of financial resources in a haphazard manner, an inequitable allocation of educational resources, and inadequate allocation of resources towards the investment of institutional infrastructure, technology, and facilitation of professional development opportunities for stakeholders. Moreover, lack in human resource and user friendly with the technology have also created a problem in education plan effective implementation. So the capacity of the stakeholders need to improve for the effective educational plan. About increasing the capacity of human resources the education head 1 added that he was working there in the education section for five years where he did not receive any capacity building trainings to enhance his capacity in education related field and planning. He also mentioned that if were no trainings how could a person draft the educational planning relevant to the local situation.

From the conversation of the education head 1, I understood that the lack of capacitated human resources may have adverse effect in the effective educational

planning. Since due to incompetency the stakeholders were unable to connect policy with the planning of education. Moreover, they could not have performed need assessment in technical way as a result the education plan could not meet the ground scenario of local government. This shows that the limited competency of the stakeholders directly affects the limited participation in educational plan. As a result, we can conclude that the education plan at local level have not meet the citizen's expectation in sector of education. Education Head of 2 Municipality 2 expressed his views as,

> *We have not linked the SDGs in our educational planning as we do not have enough competencies in relating the target and indicators linked to the education planning. So our inclusiveness and quality education agenda are difficult to ensure in the municipality itself.*

Upon the conservation with my participants (deputy/ mayor, planning officers) interaction with the stakeholders as of my participant's capacity in education planning refers to their ability to effectively participate to the planning and decision-making process related to education as an agency that affects the education planning. It clearly shows that the structure and agency are interrelated and the participation level the stakeholders to actively participate in the education planning process by involving them in consultations and decision-making. By enhancing stakeholders' capacity in education planning, stakeholders can play a more active role in shaping education policies and programs that are responsive to the needs of the community and that ensure the quality and accessibility of education for all.

Participatory Budgeting and Program Formulation

The participative planning and budgeting mechanism implemented at the Local level aims to stimulate community involvement in the designation, execution, and administration of developmental agendas. Upon the interview related to participatory budgeting and resource allocation and program formulation at Local Governments the participants were supportive in answering the questions put forward to them.

> [*Sanghiya ra pradesh sarakarle niti, nirdeshan matra dine, sourt, chheyamata ra samagri nadine ho bhane shaikshik gunastar kewal ek naramai simit rahancha](Only articulation of policy and direction form federal and province government but not sufficiently providing the resources, capacity and*

materials to Local Governments, remains quality education only as a slogan" -Deputy Mayor of Municipality1

Deputy Mayor of Municipality 2 as the lead person for budget and program formulation committee, which is the platform of exercising the planning exercise.

The committee under my leadership compiles the project proposal from all wards and divisions and sections of the municipalities. We in participatory team used to divide all the proposals and prioritized to the five thematic sections based on the indicators we set for the particular year. I used to provide the full authority to the thematic committees, regarding the education the social committee involves in prioritizing the proposals. *I was aware in prioritizing the local needs in the proposal. Moreover, I prepare the budget and proposals with ceiling provided by the federal and province governments and revenue generation of our municipality. I am proud to say that I have generated the revenue form 18 crore to 54 crores in my tenure. However, the budget is challenging to address the education sector.*

From the conversation to deputy mayor 2, I understood that the active stakeholders utilized all the committees and resources to address the educational priorities to their fullest for the effective service delivery to their citizens. Mayor of Municipality 1 added his experience as,

The participatory planning process was the major challenges in my municipalities as the all the related stakeholders including the community members, school teachers, PTA members and SMC believed that I was all in all to select the proposals. That was there mindset. So, all the proposals directly reported to me and I have to prioritize according to the most needed proposal in my municipalities. Moreover, among the thematic committees, education related thematic committee social development committee are the members of municipal executive and members represent participatory inclusive members form society for the preparation of education annual sectoral plans have to contribute to the planning process. However, due to inactiveness of this these committees, me myself and administrative personnel take responsibility for the annual plan preparation process. So this has been only the legal formalities in paper to show the participatory development.

From the conversation of mayor 1, I generated the meaning making as in the absence of adequate proficiency, the efficient allocation of resources becomes a challenging

endeavor. This have high chance to hinder their ability to obtain an effective educational plan that fails to effectively addresses their unique needs, abilities, and preferences of local. I have also noted that participation in weaker where there is only guided by the structure as local government, but the higher chance of participation is there where the stakeholders as an agency is active. Here, the mayor himself cannot convince the community level participation as they feel superior to local government. Education head of Municipality 1 shared his experiences as,

> *Municipal education committee should focus on the planning and budgeting form the very beginning stage, but they are more focused on the implementation of the proposals and budget rather than the selecting the need base proposals at planning and budgeting stages of seven steps planning process. Apart from this, education can be improved only with the support of parents and the desire of students. Stating that the quality of the school can be strengthened only with the contribution of the staff and teachers, the Local Governments will be only the facilitators.*

The perception of the education head 1 is that the effective planning of education is only possible form the collaborative participatory approach making all the agency (stakeholders) active. Planning officer of Municipality 1 shared his views as,

> *We are more focused on the conditional budget provided by the federal government as it is east to implement and ensured of the budget rather than the focus on the revenue dependent proposals of municipality. As the budget from the federal and provincial government guarantees the budget and the target activities are clear and easy to transfer that in reality whereas the local government budget may not be implemented due to the lack of revenue in the particular year.*

From the conversation with the planning officer, I understood that participatory budgeting has the potential to assume a pivotal function in the formulation of programs. Through active citizen participation in the budgetary process, policymakers and government officials can procure beneficial perspectives and contributions from the community with respect to their preferences, necessities, and envisioned objectives. This participatory approach ensures that the programs formulated align more closely with the preferences and requirements of the people based on the local needs. However due to the uncertainty of the budget for the local

resource for the activities the activities separated by the federal government were in priority that hinders to cover the local need based activities in education plan of local governments.

Deputy Mayor of Municipality 1 expressed her views regarding the budgeting and program formation as,

> *Due to lack of resources and investment, the condition of public schools is becoming critical. There is an urgent need for the government to take immediate action to improve secondary level education under the local level. Due to the low investment of the local level and the politics of the teachers, the students in government schools are in a declining state. The local level believes that the improvement of public schools has not been done due to a lack of budget. Quality of students English, Nepali and math test results compared to private schools, the condition of public-school students is pathetic.*

This is further proved that the insufficiency of financial resources can have extensive implications on implementation operations, affecting crucial components such as infrastructure, staffing, materials and monitoring. However, sufficient funds are necessary to guarantee the seamless implementation and favourable outcomes of enacted initiatives. The inadequacy of financial resources can potentially hinder the implementation of quality education in public schools.

The Mayor of Municipality 1 said that the condition of public schools is deteriorating due to not being able to provide budget. He further said that,

> *The education of the students has not improved because we have provided budget only for buying chalk duster and some maintenance. There is no resource, how can community education be improved? Some schools have more teachers and some schools have less teachers than students. Named schools have more teachers in proportion to students, while most of the big schools have very fewer teachers than students. How can public schools be improved in such a situation where there is no teacher vacancy? He should appoint teachers as needed to improve the quality of education.*

From the conversation with the participants, I understood that the participatory planning process in municipality 1 was in practice only on paper as the proposals directly reported to the mayor where mayor prioritize according to the most needed proposal in his rights. This practice has agency dominant as the superiority of the

agency (mayor) has affected the process and quality of the planning process. In contrast municipality 2 is structure dominant as the mayor of the municipalities follows the planning process in structured way. Moreover, in the same meeting of planning process the marginalized community people do not put arguments with respect to mayor as their self-position matters. This clearly indicates that the in participation, structure, and agency matter. i.e. participation theory has been influenced by the structure.

Establishing Social Accountability by Educational Planning

In specific, participatory planning has been reinforce as one of the key vehicles to lock in citizens in Local decision-making. Real advancement starts with the dynamic and important support of the citizens (Bhusal, 2018). In this regard how participation is important in educational planning in strengthen the social accountability at local governments were interviewed with the participants. The Mayor of Municipality 1 expressed his views as,

> *Participatory planning is an important tool to make planning more accountable and effective, however I have practiced that the participation in planning is weaken in participatory approach due to the low interest of citizens and our centric mind-set.*

From the communication of the mayor 1, I understood that the implementation of education planning characterized by a centric mind-set pertains to a method of decision-making and control that is centralized and typically limited to a select few stakeholders, without the active engagement and contribution of other stakeholders such as students, parents, teachers, and community members. The adoption of a centralized approach to education planning has the potential to undermine the participatory approach in various manners. Centralized decision-making can result in disempowerment and exclusion of stakeholders from the decision-making process. Planning Officer of Municipality 2 has expressed the importance participatory planning as,

> *The local community(citizens) know what is necessary to them, this applies to the education planning also. Here in our municipality, there is active participation of citizens and marginalized community as the awareness about their participation are slowly rising. Our community and SMC, PTA and the marginalized community members are active. Moreover, our plan should strengthen the social accountability of the quality education and feeling of the*

students studied in the government schools. They should be proud of enrolling in the government schools. Now the scholarships and the quality of education have raised the status of government schools and the feelings of the students being proud to represent the community schools. Even from the private boarding schools our municipality schools have name and fame in all over Nepal.

Deputy Mayor of municipality 2 expressed her views regarding the social accountability aspects,

We believe that the active participation of citizen in planning and implementation process of program activities increases transparency and social accountability in implementing the educational planning. I think, accountability and transparency may be promoted within the domain of educational planning. So, I have always promoted inclusive participation in educational planning.

From the expression of planning officer and deputy mayor about strengthening social accountability clearly indicates that accountability and transparency represent fundamental elements of educational planning, as they foster equity, productivity, and communal confidence within the educational plan. The inclusive involvement of stakeholders such as community members, parents, SMC is conducive to transparency and accountability in the context of stakeholder engagement. The inclusion of stakeholder input and feedback is imperative during the planning phase, and their perspectives should be duly considered in decision-making. Thus this increases the higher level of participation with the active engagement if agency as stakeholders. Deputy Mayor of Municipality 1 expressed her feelings as,

Education and awareness programs are much needed because although our municipality is famous for the education form very beginning, we also have marginalized lower literacy citizens only focused for their livelihood rather than the education. So, we have also launched livelihood programs to support themselves in uplifting their financial status thus they can send their children to education. So I realize that, marginalized community are themselves, to some extent, are responsible for lower participation and engagement in the planning process as they have not understood the value and importance and less concerned about their rights and responsibilities.

The participants to whom I had in-depth interview concluded that the process of educational plan form the ward level to the municipality level follows the committees and is intended to ensure that the needs and priorities of the Local communities are taken into account in the planning and budgeting process, and that there is transparency and accountability in decision-making. Hence, here the structure depends upon the agency. Here delegated power in participation is not seen so following the steps ensures the social accountability through education planning.

Concluding the Chapter

This chapter explored the engagement of the research participants regarding educational planning processes in their municipalities. Their responses on engagement local level education planning processes brought four major themes including: stakeholder's engagement in education planning, stakeholder's capacity in educational planning, participatory budgeting and program formulation, and establishing social accountability by educational planning. The findings suggest that the stakeholders of Local Governments act themselves as a superiority person in planning process, so that the local community and citizens were not interested in the structural and process of planning. This shows that the planning made in this municipality is weaker as the lower level of participation is observed due to the inactiveness of the agency (stakeholders like mayor) in planning process. Moreover, due to lack of expertise in the educational planning process, there is high chance of limited participation in planning process by the stakeholders that also results in limited the participation in formulating education plan of municipalities. The lower participation also affects transparency and accountability in decision-making and implementing the plans.

CHAPTER VI
CHALLENGES OF ADDRESSING LOCAL ASPIRATIONS

This chapter describes how the stakeholders anticipate the changes and face the challenges in educational planning addressing local aspirations based on the views expressed by the research participants during interview, observation and my own experiences as well. The challenges of addressing local aspirations are presented with eight themes as increasing local ownership and maintaining good governance, enhancing meaningful participation, prioritizing resource generation, fostering social accountability, linking educational plans with SDG, developing local curriculum and languages, enhancing stakeholder's capacities and last one is implementing policies and guidelines. According to my research participants, participatory educational planning is a process that involves the active involvement of stakeholders, including parents, teachers, students, and community members in the planning and decision-making of educational plans and programs. This process promotes ownership, transparency, and accountability, as well as ensures that educational programs are aligned with the needs and aspirations of the local community.

Under this topic, I have come across with the major eight themes as challenges or key issues which have been faced by the local governments' actors while addressing and tackling with the aspirations of local stakeholders.

Increasing Local Ownership and Maintaining Good Governance

Increasing local ownership and maintaining good governance in local planning can have many benefits, such as greater community engagement, increased accountability, and more effective and sustainable outcomes. Education head of municipality 1 expressed his views regarding the increasing local ownership and maintaining good governance as,

> *Our municipality has a name of education hub when there was none of the education institutions nearby the districts, now we are worried that this has been decreasing in the years. So, now time has come to revive the spirit of the education hub by taking ownership in education as "big merger" with policy and action by the stakeholders of the municipality for schools. Moreover, as the time of education pattern is changing, we are focused on instructional pedagogy and learning methods.*

This clearly indicates that, they have good passion to represent their municipality as an education hub as in previous stage having a sense of ownership towards increasing the quality of education. Moreover, recognizing the important role of teachers and invest in their professional development by providing the opportunities so that they can enhance their teaching skills and keep them updated with the latest pedagogical approaches.

Further, active stakeholder's involvement in education is another important agenda to be implemented for genuine ownership for education. With the collective effort of all the related stakeholders, working together, a vibrant and inspiring educational hub can be created.

Mayor of municipality 1 expressed his views as,

Changing the pattern in education should be our priority which I have tried to establish in my tenure. We have to recognize the best performance schools setting indicators for both institutionalize and community schools. I have tried to merge schools as a "big merger" that could not be succeeded due to the dual role played by teachers and political parties.

From the expression of Mayor, it is clearly understood that the education agenda of local governments directs the quality and delivery of education. However, political bias and conflict with teachers affects the local governments to promote quality education and innovation in education. Further, the agenda are less focused on enhancing Local capacity, creating applied mechanisms related to resource generation, and establishing systems to enhance equality and inclusion in education in Local Governments.

Education officer of Municipality 2 expressed his views questions in mutual accountability and transparency issues in planning as,

We have separated the day meals for Rs. 20 for each student's form class 1 to 5. Due to lack of human resources or the amount of money for day meals, schools having large number of students have started to distribute money instead to students, which have lost the objectives of providing the day meals to students. This may raise the questions in mutual accountability and transparency issues in planning. Moreover, the marginalized community members and munical executives may have not knowledge to prioritize the programmes related to education.

Since in order to institutionalized the system and plan to replicate in real ground there is challenging. While preparing a plan, inclusive participatory in each step of planning fosters transparency and accountability in developing and implementation of the planning. With more power and resources devolved to the local level, mayors and deputy mayors may have more autonomy and control over educational planning. This can result in increased local ownership and decision-making in education policies and programs

Enhancing Meaningful Participation

Meaningful participation in local planning refers to the process of involving community members and stakeholders in decision making about the development and management of their local area. moreover, with the devolution of power at local government can lead to increased community involvement in educational planning and decision-making. This can include consultation with parents, teachers, and community members to understand their needs, preferences, and aspirations for education in their communities.

Planning officer of municipality 2 expressed his aspirations related to the greater participation in education as,

> *Transparent decision making is the main issues citizens are always praise our municipality. In my opinion, maintain transparency in decision-making processes and communicate decisions effectively to stakeholders is an important for greater participation in education agenda*.

Increasing stakeholder participation in local education after the devolution of power requires deliberate efforts to engage and involve various stakeholders. The aim of meaningful participation in local planning is to ensure that the interest and needs of the community are taken into account when making decisions about development, infrastructure and public services. By involving local residents and stakeholders in the planning process, planners can get valuable insights into the social, economic and environmental factors that shape the community and identify potential areas of conflict or concern. However, due to old mindsets that should be granulated and form a new shape of federal structure strengthening stakeholder's capacity in local government (Rai, 2020).The Mayor of Municipality 1 expressed the reason, why there is still more to go to receive actual and realistic plans based on the local needs and demands as,

> *We cannot motivate the local communities in the participation in the planning process from the community level, ward level and the munical executives and marginalized members aligned with the structure of seven steps planning. This is the reason, still more to go to receive actual and realistic programs based on the local needs and demands. Moreover, community members and other responsible SMC members and PTA members approach me directly to include the education need in planning as they thought me as all in all in the decision making of the program selection.*

Local governments may have limited resources to devote to participatory educational planning, which can hinder efforts to involve effective participation in the process. The lack of resources could limit the scope of the planning, as well as the extent to which the community participation can participate in the planning process. There is necessity of inclusive environment for producing proprietorship in planning and improvement. Participation here has been influenced by the structure and agency in the educational planning.

Prioritizing Resource Generation and Mobilization

Devolution of power can also enhance resource mobilization at the local level. Mayors and deputy mayors may have greater control over local budgets and can leverage additional resources from donors and partners to support educational programs and initiatives.

The Deputy Mayor of municipality 2 expressed her views regarding authority to plan, prioritize, and implement local development projects as,

> *In my tenure, I have always thought of own resource generating form the municipality with care for justice for citizens of the municipality. In my tenure, I remember, I have given two priorities one increasing own resource by revenue increment with participation of the citizen's form 19 crore to 52 crores and the other is priority for education for long term development to make educational hub for our municipality.*

The expression form the deputy mayor can be understood as, the local government bodies have been granted certain concurrent and exclusive rights for resource and revenue generation as outlined in the Constitution of Nepal (2015) and the Local Government Operation Act (2017). Moreover, local governments have the authority to plan, prioritize, and implement local development projects within their jurisdiction. Local governments can generate revenue through various means, such as

leasing or renting public properties, issuing licenses and permits, and collecting user fees for local services.

[Kasaudima bhat bhaye po paskena sajilo huncha ra?] (It's easy to serve rice only if there is rice in pot) -The Deputy Mayor of Municipality 1. The Deputy Mayor of Municipality 1 expressed her views for the challenging in managing the resources in education as,

> *I did not allow schools to be merged inspite of policy of federal government and lack of resources to operate them. As, on visiting the schools, teachers, students and their parents I came to realize that the rights to education for all should be treated equal. So, I was always stand against merging the schools although there were hardships in allocation of budgets to operate them.*

Education head of Municipality 1 expressed his views depending on conditional grants from federal governments in the education sector as,

> *We are more dependent on conditional grants from federal governments in the education sector. This fiscal year (2079/080), our municipality has separated budget just three million five hundred thousand (NPR 35 Lakhs) for whole municipality education programs. Within this budget, we cannot construct quality of works nor can provide all teachers training promoting ICT in education? Moreover, the first reason why Local Governments are reluctant to invest in education is that they do not see immediate returns like digging roads. It takes at least 10 years to get the return on investment in education. But since the elections will be held in five years, most of the people's representatives of the Local government are not inclined to give priority to education. Because of the psychology that investing in schools that are already established and running cannot give the public the feeling of any new development, the strategy of investing in education for the local people's representatives may not work.*

Education officer 2 of municipality expressed his views regarding the budget is not enough in education sector as,

> *In our municipality from the internal revenue source for this fiscal year we have separated more than eight crore rupees, which is very high compared to the neighbouring municipalities. however, the budget allocated is always not enough. The federal government cannot provide the teachers as per student ratio. On the other hand, the municipality cannot have offered to bear all the*

> *expenses. For example, one of the community schools in our municipality have more than 8000 (eight thousand) students but the teacher's management position "darbandi" is only 60 (sixty). There more than 150 teachers are hired by internal school sources. There are many other schools in our municipality like this. Our Municipality supports only 27 teachers for different schools (ECD to secondary education (plus 2)) and still lacks resources to cover all.*

This expression indicates that the local government having the huge responsibility in education planning, formulating, implementing, and monitoring of education is not sufficient that hinders the effective quality education plan to be effective in real ground. There are special reasons for handing over the entire authority of secondary education to the Local government. This was done in the belief that the management and operation of education would be effective, that local needs would be identified and diagnosed objectively, that problems would be dealt with promptly and that educational quality would improve. However, the difficulties of the school, the needs of the school children and the problems of the teaching staff have still a lot to be addressed.

Fostering Social Accountability

As local government are responsible for education delivery at the local level, they have prioritized some agendas in education as equality and inclusion, management of the teachers, curriculum emphasis on local needs, safe learning environment, governance and accountability, issues of free education and commitments to right to education.

Planning officer of municipality 2 expressed his views regarding more accountable to the local community for the outcomes of educational policies and programs. as,

> *Our municipality have prioritized the quality education as foremost agenda, day meal program, health issues, distribution of more than 7000 sanitary pads in the year 2077 has make significant changes in education which are liked elected representatives as they highlight their publicity in communities. Moreover, our long-term priority to make our municipality a hub of quality education enhancing the quality and infrastructure in education sector.*

With greater local ownership and decision-making, mayors, deputy mayors, and planning officers may become more accountable to the local community for the

outcomes of educational policies and programs. This can result in increased transparency, feedback, and monitoring of educational activities.

Overall, devolution of power at the local level can provide an opportunity for mayors, deputy mayors, and planning officers in Nepal to promote participatory educational planning and improve educational outcomes for local communities. However, this requires strong political will, effective leadership, and robust stakeholder engagement to ensure that educational policies and programs are aligned with Local needs and priorities.

Linking Educational Plans with SDG

The goals and target of Sustainable Improvement Goal(SDG) 4 are very crucial to achieve. The SDG key document, transforming Our World: The 2030 Plan for Sustainable Improvement (United Nations [UN], 2015) has made taking after commitment to quality instruction and instruction is the on-going priority development motivation for addressing the needs of marginalized communities and leaving no one behind.

Deputy Mayor 2 of municipality expressed her experience about ownership about the education as,

> *Local governments' contribution to promoting sustainable development and realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be overstated. However, Local Government entities do not have capacity to cultivate a heightened perception of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that lacks the ownership. We understand that the SDGs are important for us, inspite of this due to the difficulties in implying the target and indicators and lack of resources Local Government have not really own the SDGs.*

From the conversation form the deputy mayor 2, I understood that engaging the multiple stakeholders into the planning process is imperative for fostering a sense of local ownership. Moreover, Local Governments have to establish multi-stakeholder platforms which comprise representatives from various sectors including government agencies, civil society organizations and the private sector in local governments which facilitates in participatory decision-making processes and ensure diverse perspectives are considered in SDG implementation strategies. However, the technicality and lack of resources are the major two hinder factors for ownership of SDGs in local governments. Education Head of municipality 1 expressed his views about the competencies regarding the target and indicators of SDGs as,

We have not linked the SDGs in our educational planning as we do not have enough competencies in relating the target and indicators linked to the education planning. So, our inclusiveness and quality education agenda are difficult to ensure in the municipality itself.

Education officer of municipality 2 expressed his views for implementing the SDGs in the municipalities as,

> *Our municipality has developed with a team of external experts to make the municipal education five years' plan (2076/77- 2080/81). We have tried to link the SDG to that plan. However, sadly I have to say that we have not linked SDG with our annual budget and plan to date with internalization of SDG 4 in our community.*

From the above views expressed there is still a lack to link the SDG agenda in the planning process. Since its urgent need to localize the SDG target and indicators by local government and implement SDGs as per their context which not only make easier and more realistic planning but also promotes inclusiveness, a participatory approach and make planning transparent and accountable.

Developing Local Curriculum and Languages

To support local government in creating local curriculum MoEST (2019b) has emphasized promoting local knowledge, abilities, items, culture, expressions, local languages, and so on. The guideline has clarified the major duty local government for local educational programs. The Deputy Mayor of municipality 1 have a bitter experience in development of local curriculum. She expressed her views as,

> *We made a curriculum based on local needs, highlighting the municipal identities and language in curriculum with the good sum of money and resources invest in it. However, it's been five years still the curriculum has not yet implemented fully.*

The Deputy Mayor of municipality 2 expressed her views regarding curriculum at local government as,

> *One of the education priorities of our municipality is also to prepare curriculum based on local needs and relevant to the present context. In this regard we have prepared a curriculum for our municipality for grade 1 to 8. The curriculum weightage is 100 marks per grade. We have seeked support from the experts as experts have clear idea of the curriculum design than us*

(elected representatives). The curriculum developed by our municipality has good impact in our students.

The above views expressed by the local elected representatives have brought up the real scenario of curriculum development. Since the responsible authority of need assessment, development of the curriculum need to be completed by local governments, in developing curricula participatory approach and curriculum cycle need to be applied based on the geographical, socio-cultural, and other dimensions for developing the curriculum. In one of the municipality it is clearly understood that, curriculum is effectively implemented while in contrast in the other municipality effective curriculum has applied in their municipality addressing the local needs in content of curriculum.

Enhancing Stakeholders' Capacities

As participatory planning engages the stakeholders in decision-making, resource allocation, and project implementation so that exact necessity and priority can be elaborated to carry out activities however the lack in capacity regarding technical skills and ability to internalized the local needs in planning is always a question to be think about. The Education Section Head of Municipality 1 expressed his views as,

Since the planning process is technical one to relate with the indicators and targets it is difficult to prioritize the activities related to education with aligned with national -international commitments and the limited budgets for education sector.

The Deputy Mayor of Municipality 1 expressed he views

Understanding the entire seven steps planning process for all the committee members and marginalized groups is really challenging. In this regard planning and budgeting at the Local level are less realistic as a result unable in addressing Local needs and expectations.

The Education officer of municipality 2 expressed as,

I have not received any capacitated trainings to enhance my capacity in education related field and planning for five years. If we are not familiar with today's policy and planning, then how could we draft the educational planning relevant to the present needs. Moreover, skills for ICT implementation for teachers and SDG linkage in formulating the plan for members of committees is a must for real planning and implementation.

Stakeholders in educational planning may not have the necessary expertise or knowledge to fully participate in the planning process. This can result in a plan that may not be fully informed or lacks the technical expertise necessary to implement it effectively. So, participation has been affected by the structure and agency.

Implementing the Policies and Guidelines

The Act relating to Compulsory and Free Education, 2075 has been created to satisfy the citizen's right to education as provisioned within the Constitution of Nepal 2015. Local Governments are facing difficulty as the opportunity to develop a complete sense of ownership over school education due to constitution have been transferred to Local Governments and the federal government has barred local governments from implementing some of these rights (Democracy Resource Centre Nepal, 2020). The Education Section Head of municipality 1 expressed his views regarding free education as,

> *The policy formed by the government of Nepal as per constitution are difficult in implementation as there is provision of free education of basic and secondary education, but it cannot be applied in Local government creates dilemma in implementation.*

The Deputy Mayor of municipality 2 expressed his views as,

> *Annual budget and program is based on the policy and program of the municipality. Since there is the assumption of the revenue generation to imply the policy and program into annual budget and program. I have found that due to the not real assumption of the revenue generation we have been faced difficulty in out tenure.*

From the above information we can make a meaning that, formulating plan is not Local Government is struggling themselves to turn the education free agenda for its citizen which is under the jurisdiction of local government as provisioned in the constitution. So, here the structure is dominant in local government as the policy have affected the service delivery of the local government implementing the plan.

Concluding the Chapter

This chapter explored the challenges of addressing local aspirations of the research participants regarding educational planning processes in their municipalities. Their responses on challenges on addressing local level education planning processes brought eight major themes including: as increasing local ownership and maintaining good governance, enhancing meaningful participation, prioritizing resource

generation, fostering social accountability, linking educational plans with SDG, developing local curriculum and languages, enhancing stakeholder's capacities and last one is implementing policies and guidelines.The findings suggest that the stakeholders of local governments are aspired by the responsibilities they have and fully committed to bear the ownership for local level education planning process in fulfilling the local aspirations. However, due to increment of responsibilities in education of local governments in meeting the expectations as the constitution mandate and lack of resources and limited capacity in planning process faced several challenges. Similarly, due to unlimited expectations and aspirations of the community's local stakeholders are facing challenges implementing in their plans.

CHAPTER VII
DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss and explore how local Governments practice and stakeholders engage themselves in formulating the educational plan of the local government through this research. The findings are associated with the three research questions depending on the understanding and practices of local government and the engagement of the stakeholder's engagement in formulating the educational planning and challenges of addressing local aspirations. Further, the discussion and the meaning-making process have been followed through the theoretical interpretation, review of literature and self-reflection under the following themes.

Structuration theory and Participation theory and helps me to analyse the relationship between the planning system of local government as structure and active agency of mayor, deputy mayor, planning officer and educational section head and their level of participation. I have found that where the structure is only active, there is a lower level of participation in the municipality but in contrast where agency are active there is a high level of participation and effective education plan in observed. Moreover, to measure the level of the participation, Arnstein (1969) presents eight levels of participation (from lower to higher level): manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. she describes, the first two levels refer to as non-participation level, the third, fourth and fifth indicate tokenism and the topmost level refers to real citizen participation. I have captured their understanding, practices and engagement regarding the education planning at local government. Further, this theoretical concept is still applicable and appropriate in many contexts and locations in Nepal.

Understanding Stakeholders' Understanding on Educational Planning

This study provided the insight that the structure and legal provisions that are provided by the constitutions, law acts for local governments in planning promotes citizens to hold their elected officials accountable and demand transparency and accountability in the decision-making process. This is also supported by the Rijal (2023), as the implementation of a legal and institutional framework can produce favourable results and consequences solely within a conducive context of democracy and active participation. It is understood that encouraging active participation from all

stakeholders, mayors can ensure that the educational needs of their communities are addressed and that resources are allocated effectively. Moreover, the stakeholders understand that the education planning is document where the plan is made and implemented according to the local needs.

Regarding the educational planning of local government this study also linked education planning process with seven steps planning process of local level planning relating with its stakeholders. The figure 6 clearly reflects the educational planning of local government drawn from this study.

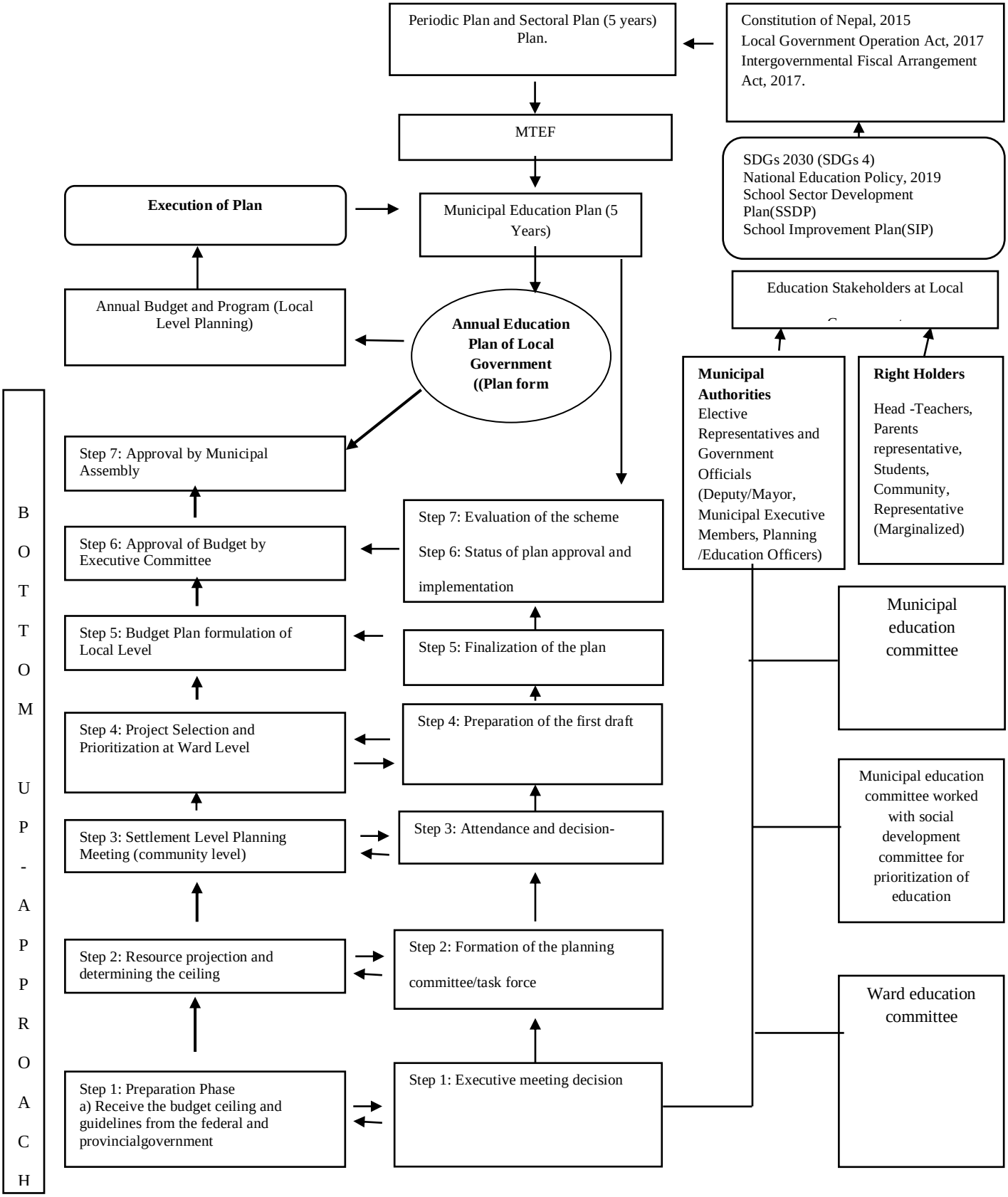
This study also revealed stakeholders hardly want to go to community for planning process thus interacting with the community and understanding the process is weaker in the real ground. Since first phase after the elected led representatives have to be engaged more in process of coordination and making the acts aligned with provincial and federal government that directly affects the education planning process however it is also found that the key actors are busier in in executing the plans. This means to implement the structure provided by the constitution education plan was less prioritizing compared to infrastructure and construction.

Moreover, the superiority of the elected representative in education planning have affected the planning process to make more participatory and inclusive. The participative planning and budgeting mechanism implemented at the local level aims to stimulate community involvement in the designation, execution, and administration of developmental agendas. The participatory budgeting and resource allocation and program formulation at local governments the elected representative felt themselves superior in formulating the plans as they assumed themselves to know the local needs as they represent the citizen of that localities. The involvement of the stakeholders in education planning has increase their confidence to meet the citizen expectation but there is a room for more to go for more effective participation and education planning.

In understanding the level of participation is as tokenism level as the stakeholders keep their voices to the power holders as a mayor which is agency dominate due to his severity in formulating educational plans. This shows that the higher level of participation exists where the stakeholders as an agency is active in implementation of the plan in participatory way.

Figure 6

Educational Planning of Local Government



Practice of Stakeholders' Engagement in Education Planning Process

This study provides the insight that the stakeholders of local governments are aspired by the responsibilities they have and fully committed to bear the ownership for local level education planning process. The elective representatives are equally concerned with facilitating and empowering the newly established entities with exercising their powers and duties. Stakeholders' engagement in educational planning is being exercised only in the documentation but in practice, the outcome is not derived as expected in the long run.

The findings of this study reveal that the educational planning at the local level does not fully capacitate to meet the local needs and expectations. This means there is a gap in fulfilling the local needs. The engagement of local government as a door steps government for effective service delivery should address the local people need (Chaudhary, 2019).

Moreover, this study also reveals that limited understanding of stakeholders creates limited engagement. The limited engagement of stakeholders are due the structures of local government several committees to be involved by the same persona and the stakeholders due to the limited understanding about the thematic topics limited their input in the educational planning process. However, the implementation of educational plans at the local level can be hindered by various obstacles that may vary contingent upon the particular structure of local government. In this regards among the five sub-sectoral committee, for planning and management purposes: infrastructure development, social development, organizational development (including governance), economic development; and environmental and disaster management, where educational planning belongs to social development is the least prioritized sector where as infrastructure sector and economic sector are highly prioritizing one. As a result, seven steps planning is not properly followed in making the educational plans and education is not a core agenda in the local municipalities. This insight also supports the literature suggesting that only transferring the responsibility of education system to Local Government result in a situation wherein previous methods are simply rebranded without accomplishing significant modifications (Gnawali, 2018).

The municipal education committee is more focused on the implementation of the program activities already planned rather than formulating the participatory planning process in education planning. The structural and responsibilities issues have

also affected the educational planning. This insight is also in line with the finding of as in literature of Rijal (2023) as considerable proportion of local governments have yet to execute disclosure-related provisions, and the accountability framework exhibits profound deficiencies pertaining to both its structural and operational dimensions. Since the elective representative formulating plan is one of the important responsible in effective implementing the rights given to them. However, effort made by local government is inadequate in developing quality education, learning achievement, identification of necessary human resources at the local level and formulation of education policy.

However, the hinder in preparing an effective plan is due to old mind-sets that should be granulated and form a new shape of the federal structure by building capacity with participatory processes (Rai, 2020). This centric mind-set forms the federal is continued in the local elected representatives at local level and are less aware of the local autonomy and responsibility to empower the local governments. This insight is also in line with the findings of the study by Acharya et al. (2022) as inadequate participation of marginalized communities in the planning process of Nepal has persisted due to the deep rooted feudal cultural practices and the dominance of elite actors within the planning process. Their voices are not heard properly, and their knowledge about education planning and implementation is not acknowledged. As a result, in the name of participatory engagement in educational planning process local governments compromised to carry out their own local plans in implementation.

Planning for Capacity Enhancement of the Stakeholders

This study provided the insight that capacity of understanding education plan is an important all stakeholders put all the activities into action provided at local government, however not much recognition has been paid for quality education, learning achievement, identification of necessary human resources at the local level and formulation of education policy. Moreover, Dhungana (2019) focuses on accountability to be integrated with the cycle of planning and execution of planning where education planning is no exceptional to strengthen the transparency and accountability. In this process, the participation and structure as Local Government and agency as participants in planning process not reflect the scenario need to be explored.

Participatory budgeting is a process that involves citizens in decision-making around budget allocation and program formulation. It is an approach that aims to

promote transparency, accountability, and citizen's engagement in local governance. In this context, the school sector improvement plan has to prepared by schools and need to submit to respective local government for the coordination of the activities to be implemented with the annual planning process of education. Despites, the best result all over Nepal form public schools by one of the municipalities, both the two municipalities, have not properly monitored and have compulsion of submitting the SIP in the municipalities. This shows that the local government have not able to capacitated themselves in planning and monitoring process for effective implementation of education plans.

Moreover, educational planning should relate to reforming the present educational cycle, predicting future possibilities and generating practical and attainable goals by preparing executive plans for execution and periodic appraisal of development and performance. Upon discussion with the municipality, educational planning is one of the less priorities due to its technical aspects that hardly gets into the municipal authorities.

However, through the lens form participation theory, as a supportive tool to analyse the capacity in engaging themselves as nonparticipation as elected representatives feel that they are the representatives of their citizen and know the agenda for planning. As said by Arnsterin, (1969) the stakeholders in the educational planning process replicate the "tokenism" in front of the elected representatives that allow power to fewer people to hear and raise their voices This insight is also with the line that the hierarchical structure of society creates barrier in meaningful participation of people in educational planning (Parajuli, 2007).

Reflections on Policy versus Implementation

Policy and implementation are two important components of local governments' education plans. Local governments play a critical role in setting policies related to education, as well as ensuring that those policies are implemented effectively.

This study provided the insight that despite the the policy has a beautiful provision for free education the planning provision of education of basic and secondary level, it has not yet been implemented however one of the municipalities have made significant progress in providing quality education and scholarships for needy girl's support program in education. This insight also supports the literature by K.C (2022) that the Compulsory and Free Education Act, 2019 is sanctioned to

execute the constitutionally guaranteed essential right to instruction, and arrangement of free and compulsory school education without evidence-based investigation, planning and budgeting.

Similarly, SSDP (2016-2023) also endorsed educational activities that are useful administratively and integrate leadership opinion to increase the quality of education in public schools. However, School Improvement Plans (SIP) are not aligned with the annual budgeting and planning of the local government, so the effective implementation of the plan turns major challenges. Similarly, I noted that the local governments commitment to common responsibility, transparency and consideration to focusing on resources towards the foremost powerless, including children with disabilities advances inclusive education and their wellbeing promotes inclusive education and their health. But, due to the implementation challenges, malpractice is being practiced which needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

As there has been significant progress in making plans, policies and guidelines related to education in both municipalities still the implementation factors of that policy have remained challenging due to lack of resources, capacity and weak coordination gaps between the three tiers of government. Local governments must strike a balance between setting policies that are realistic and achievable, while also ensuring that they are implemented effectively. As in my research with theoretical lens the participants have incorporated the plans as a superiority in themselves as a result due to agency dominance in educational planning due to the excessive power gain to them. So participation has been affected by the local government structure and the roles of participants as an agency. Effective implementation requires careful planning, resource allocation, and ongoing evaluation and feedback to ensure that policies are achieving their intended outcomes.

Concluding the Chapter

This chapter explored the discussion carried out based on the interpretations of information presented in chapters IV, V and VI under the four themes understanding key actors' understanding on educational planning, practice of stakeholders' engagement in education planning process, planning for capacity enhancement of the stakeholders, reflections on policy versus implementation with my reflections, literature and theoretical insights. The findings suggest that the structure and legal provisions that are provided by the constitution and related laws for local governments in planning promotes citizen participation to hold their elected officials accountable and demand transparency and accountability in the decision-making process. However, the educational planning at the local level does not fully capacitate to meet the local needs and expectations. This means there is a gap in fulfilling the local needs. This reveals that the local governments have not been able to capacitate themselves in planning and monitoring process for effective implementation of education plans. Similarly, this study indicates that where only the structure is dominant there the level of participation is tokenism i.e. lower level of participation and their voices do not hold the power to execute the education plan. Likewise, if the agency as structure is active in formulating the educational plan there is always high chance to have higher level of participation of the stakeholders.

CHAPTER VIII
CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This chapter includes the conclusion and implications of my research about educational planning at local governments. Further, it focuses on the exploration and analysis of local government practices and experiences in educational planning. Finally, this chapter comprises implications of the key new knowledge and explorations related to policy, practice and research.

Conclusions

My first conclusion is about the active and fruitful participation of stakeholders in formulating the educational planning process is helpful to improve the quality education practices at local government and promoting quality education meeting local needs, and improving transparency, and accountability. In spite of significant efforts, an important engagement of stakeholder's (key actors), within the arranging prepare of local governments remained insignificant due to the deep-rooted primitive cultural practices and control superiority within the arranging handle and are less mindful of the local autonomy and duty to engage the local governments. As a result, seven steps planning is not properly followed in making the educational plans. Furthermore, the municipal education committee is more focused on the implementation of the program activities already planned rather than formulating the participatory planning process in education planning.

My second conclusion is about the issues in the planning capacity of the stakeholders engaged in educational planning. This study has explored that local governments have not prioritized training and capacitating their staff in planning as it is a technical process to be followed the steps of planning with alignment with the federal and provincial guidelines and commitments. The limited understanding creates limited engagement as the municipal sectoral committees have less competency in relating the targets and actual needs of the local communities. My study has found that participation theory has been influenced by structuration i.e. ladder of participation has been affected by agency and structure as the position of mayor and marginalized community member's participation also affect the participation level.

My third conclusion is that educational planning is still a less prioritized subject in the local governments. Although education priorities are set at ward level planning process, they get limited priority in the municipality level planning phases. Because, the sectoral committees give their priority to other sectors such as infrastructure and economic activities rather than the education sector. In these limitations they showed key challenges of budgetary resources, human capacities, mutual accountability, transparency and good governance.

Finally, my fourth conclusion is that as local government is considered as the nearest government of the citizen to provide service at its doorsteps, it has to focus more on implementation of the plans and programs. This study also concludes that only legal provisions and structures are not sufficient to guarantee access of each citizen to fundamental right to basic and secondary level education which is under the jurisdiction of Local Governments. Equally, this study concludes that better partnerships and collaborations among stakeholders and their capacity building could positively contribute to improve educational planning and execution practices making positive impacts. Lastly, viewing this research with theoretical lenses, the findings also suggest that participation of the local stakeholders has been affected by agency (key actors) rather than the structure in participatory planning process, because higher level of participation is observed where the agencies is active.

Implications of Findings of My Research

I believe that this research has a significant contribution to stakeholder engagement in educational planning in the context of local governments in Nepal. Further, this research has revealed the key challenges and issues of stakeholder participation, issues in local curriculum, policy formation versus implementations, resources allocation and social accountability and transparency. Also, this research has added value in the qualitative research area by applying the case study methods. This will be a significant reference for researchers who want to study educational planning in the future. Further, they can research the same topic in other locations which may have different contexts and practices. For academicians, it will guide them to make logical decisions to carry out similar studies in the future.

This research has implicated that the meaningful participation of stakeholders in formulating the educational planning is helpful to upgrade the quality education practices at local governments and promotes quality education, meeting the local needs, thus improving transparency, and accountability. Based on the findings of this

research, different projects can be prepared and implemented to enhance participatory planning in local governments in educational planning. The knowledge-building through this research will be a key reference document for the local governments of Nepal. Further, it will be very useful for the stakeholders such as provincial and local governments, national and international non-governmental organizations (I/NGOs) to prepare and formulate the planning related to educational planning for effective service delivery.

Moreover, it can be implicated that there is a gap between policy provisions and practices due to planning capacity and clear responsibilities between the three tiers of governance. Hence, policymakers can use the knowledge explored by this research to revisit policies, plans, and programs, local, provincial, and federal governments and other educational agencies. It will also be equally helpful to bridge the gap between policy provision and practices in formulating evidence-based education planning and implementation mechanisms.

Future Research

There are many other scopes of research related to planning: how citizen have been experiencing their participation in other tiers of government (Federal and Provinces); and how is their status in the policy level of educational planning in Nepal? These can be the pertinent issues of research related to educational planning in the coming days for researchers.

Additionally, similar types of research could be planned in a wider scale by the future researcher based on provincial and federal governments as there is still lacking of research on educational planning. The following areas could be explored by carrying out the research work in a wider scale:

First, exploration from the right holder's perspective of stakeholders (as head teacher, PTA, SMC head, teachers, citizens) about the educational planning process, since this research is based on the municipalities' key authorities' understanding and engagement in educational planning process.

Second, an exploration could be on the socio-cultural as well as other factors associated with poor level of stakeholder's participation in the educational planning process. For these marginalized sections of the communities such as women, Dalits, ethnic groups', concerns need to be further explored.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I- Interview Guidelines

RQ A: How do stakeholders (deputy/mayor, planning/education officers) understood educational plan in the Local Governments?

Sub question A1: What is the process of making decisions in Village/Municipal Education Committee for educational plan in Local Government?

Sub question A2: How planning (seven) steps are encorporated in educational planning in Local Government?

Sub question A3: How do budgets allocated and targets/indicators are set while preparing educational planning?

Sub question A4: What are the major priority areas (long/short term) in the Local education plan(s)?

Sub question A5: How does seven steps planning process contribute to enhancing the quality education?

Sub question A6: What are the major issues in education plan(s)?

RQ B: How do stakeholders engage in the educational planning?

Sub question B1: Who takes part in the educational planning process?

Sub question B2: What is the role of stakeholders in educational planning in Local Government?

Sub question B3: How the issues raised by stakeholders are addressed while preparing educational plan and in review process as well aligned with targeted indicators?

Sub question B4: What are the provisions of participatory inclusive approach in formulating educational plan in Local Government?

Sub Question B5: In what way the process of social accountability can be strengthened while engaging in education planning?

Sub question B6: How do policy and program document education issues are encorporated in yearly program and budget formation of Local Government?

Appendix 2: Responsibilities, duties and powers of Local Governments in education

1. Formulation of policy, law, standards of early childhood development and education, basic
education, parent education, non-formal education, open and alternative continuous learning, community learning and special education; and its planning, implementation,
monitoring, evaluation and regulation.
2. Establishment, operation, management and regulation of community, institutional and cooperative schools.
3. Approval, planning, operation, management and regulation of technical education and
vocational training.
4. Approval, monitoring and regulation of schools providing education in mother tongue.
5. Property management of merged or closed schools.
6. Formation and management of education committee.
7. Formation and management of school management committee.
8. Naming of schools.
9. Ownership of land of public school, recordkeeping of the property, protection and management.
10. Improvement of school quality and distribution of learning materials.
11. Management of position of teacher and staff position in community school.
12. School mapping, approval, adjustment and regulation.
13. Education infrastructure construction, maintenance, operation and management of community schools.
14. Conduction of examination of basic level; monitoring and management.
15. Auditing and management of student learning achievement.
16. Provision of free education and scholarship management.
17. Approval and regulation of out of school activities like tuition, coaching.
18. Protection, promotion and standardization of local knowledge, skill and technology.
19. Operation and management of local library and public reading room.
20. Coordination and regulation of secondary level education activities.

21. Management of grant and budget to community school, maintenance of financial discipline of account, its monitoring and regulation.
22. Training and capacity development of teachers and staffs.
23. Operation of extra-curricular activities.

Source: LGOA, 2017; Constitution of Nepal (2015)