CONNECTING CLASSROOMS

Developing effective learning in Nepal: Insights into school leadership, teaching methods and curriculum
Developing effective learning in Nepal: Insights into school leadership, teaching methods and curriculum

Edited by: Chris Tweedale and Jess Staufenberg
This project is part-funded with UK aid from the British people. The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) pursues our national interests and projects the UK as a force for good in the world. We promote the interests of British citizens, safeguard the UK’s security, defend our values, reduce poverty and tackle global challenges with our international partners.
CONTENTS

Foreword ........................................................................................................................................................................... vi

Foreword ........................................................................................................................................................................... vii

Introduction ................................................................................................................................................................... 1

Sponsored research studies

Core skills integration in the Nepalese secondary school curriculum ................................................................. 5

Core skills for employability ........................................................................................................................................ 17

International perspectives on global learning ............................................................................................................. 26

The changing role of school leaders:
What the best school leaders do and how they do it .............................................................................................. 43

Attributes of successful school leaders ....................................................................................................................... 50

Sponsored case studies

Leading on effective quality assurance in schools ............................................................................................................. 64

The role of school leaders in supporting the professional development of teachers .................................................. 68

School-community relations in developing life skills for students ............................................................................. 73

Benefits of international school partnerships for teaching and learning ................................................................. 77

Teaching critical thinking and problem solving in the classroom ............................................................................. 81

Effective assessment of project-based learning ............................................................................................................ 86

Embedding digital literacy in the classroom .................................................................................................................... 90

Global citizenship and global learning in schools ..................................................................................................... 94

Developing student leadership through student clubs .............................................................................................. 100
FOREWORD

I am delighted to be writing this foreword for the British Council publication Developing effective learning in Nepal: Insights into school leadership, teaching methods and curriculum. This publication comes at a very pertinent time for Nepal, as the areas covered under the publication have been identified as key areas of development under the national School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) 2016–2023.

The Ministry of Education in Nepal is working on policies that will enable better management and governance of our schools. While the School Management Committees (SMCs) will have stronger roles in the planning and internal management of schools, the head teachers will focus more on pedagogical leadership and teacher professional development leading effective teaching and learning in schools.

This publication outlines what has worked in school leadership in other countries, which will be a good reference for school leaders in our country. It also offers insight into both international and local perspectives on policies and practice in school leadership, teacher professional development, curriculum implementation and integration of core skills. The publication will be very useful for anyone in the education field wishing to be up to date about current trends in the area.

Through the Connecting Classrooms programme, the British Council has been promoting international collaboration, core skills embedded into communicative classroom teaching and capacity development for teachers and school leaders. As part of the programme, many school leaders from Nepal have received the opportunity to travel to the UK and learn from their partner schools. The school leaders from the UK have also travelled to Nepal to learn about our culture and ways of working. These activities are aligned to Nepal’s commitment to help achieve the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on quality education. The SSDP also strongly advocates for international co-operation and collaboration to share and replicate international best practice for educational development in the country.

In the coming years the government will be exploring how international learning and collaboration can be embedded into the curriculum and also exploring different ways in which we could streamline the capacity development of our school leaders. We hope to work closely with organisations like the British Council to prepare and build the concepts of instructional leadership in order to promote quality education in our schools.

I hope all the readers can make the best use of this publication. All the best!

Dr Tulashi Prasad Thapaliya
Director General, CEHRD
FOREWORD

Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning is a flagship programme co-funded by the British Council and the UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. Involving over 30 countries around the world – including four in South Asia – Connecting Classrooms seeks to provide opportunities for school leaders, teachers and students to develop core skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and imagination, and a global outlook through international partnerships and school-based projects. The programme also supports the development of school leaders’ skills, helping these individuals to develop their practice in instructional leadership, focusing on the quality of education provision within their institutions.

As a part of this programme in Nepal, we are delighted to be able to publish this volume, which brings together a variety of insights into the realities of schools across the country. The initial chapters provide useful background theory to these key areas of core skills, school leadership and global learning, before these ideas are then illustrated through a series of case studies.

Some education theories might be universal and can easily be adapted into different contexts. However, in today’s times of rapid change, one size hardly fits all. Moreover, in culturally diverse countries like Nepal, where one local context can be completely different from the other, a research- and evidence-based approach is needed to find out what works best for our schools. This volume does exactly that. It highlights the need for careful analysis of the context and underlines the importance of high-quality research conducted within a range of contexts to inform the development of all aspects of education systems.

There is undoubtedly a strong commitment to the development of quality education in Nepal. The government – national and local – along with development organisations, administrators, school leaders, teacher educators and associations, teachers, parents, community leaders and the students themselves all play a part in achieving these goals. The role of organisations such as the British Council is to provide platforms and forums for convening these various groups to discuss the issues and challenges they face, as well as to share evidence and learning from the experience of the education system in the UK along with projects we undertake across the world. Publications such as this one contribute to both of these roles.

Here, we bring together insights from Nepal, the UK and a number of other countries – each of which is looking to find ways to continue developing its education system. While countries, cultures and people may all be unique, we all have one thing in common: we all want the best for our young people, for them to lead happy and fulfilled lives within a supportive local, national and global community. There is no doubt that a strong education system is fundamental to this goal.

For the past 60 years and counting, we at the British Council are privileged to have been able to work in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, to achieve Nepal’s objectives for quality education. We have been doing this through various English and Education projects, policy dialogue events, exchange visits and research publications. I am hopeful that the evidence in this publication, like the ones in the past, will help strengthen the design and delivery of education programmes in the future.
I would like to sincerely thank the Connecting Classrooms Steering Committee members at the MoEST for their continuous support, the editors and authors for all their work on this important publication, along with the project team members – past and present – who have contributed to its production: Ashim Kharel, Sharda Joshi, Gaurab Sharma and Roshani Thapa. Most importantly, I would like to convey my thanks to all of the educators who commit themselves to improving teaching and learning in Nepal for all of our children.

Vaishali Pradhan
Head of English and Education
British Council Nepal
ATTRIBUTES OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL LEADERS

Donnie Adams, Kenny SL Cheah, Alma Harris, Bambang Sumintono and Noni Nadiana Md Yusoff

INTRODUCTION
Improving low-performing schools remains a major concern and challenge for school systems, states and community stakeholders (Yoon & Barton, 2019). This chapter aims to break down some of the arguments around school leadership and its role in creating the conditions for lasting school improvement and change. The chapter commences with some explanation and contextualisation of the idea of ‘turnaround schools’ from the academic literature. Then the chapter will provide some background on the Malaysian education system.

Next, we will discuss a case study comprising five low-performing schools in Malaysia that have secured significant improvement. We will focus on illuminating the characteristics and strategies of the school leaders. Finally, the chapter will provide insights into and implications of school turnaround, which may be useful for any attempts at school improvement and system transformation in contexts like Nepal.

TURNAROUND SCHOOLS
Research into turnaround schools has been undertaken in many education systems such as Australia, Canada, England and Sweden (Liu, 2020). However, research in Asia, particularly in developing countries, remains relatively limited. The term ‘school turnaround’ appears to have an intuitive meaning as there is a lack of agreement regarding its definition (Stuit, 2012). Thus, ‘no single definition of school turnaround exists’ (Hochbein & Mahone, 2017).

Turnaround as a process refers to the transformation of low-performing schools into high-performing schools, involving a period of transition from difficulty to stability, as reflected by its higher levels of student performance and academic achievement (Harris & Jones, 2019; Chapman & Muijs, 2013). The term ‘turnaround’ therefore refers to a strategy towards a goal. It proposes that the school’s entire population must have a receptive and optimistic attitude toward changes and ongoing improvement (Liu, 2020).

Recent research has found that turnaround schools tend to have high percentages of students living in poverty (Reyes & Garcia, 2014). These schools must overcome a multitude of challenges such as finance (Liu, 2020), limited resources (Duke & Jacobson, 2011), an unhealthy school culture (Rodríguez, 2008), poor facilities and poor leadership (Harris et al., 2018). Yet, these schools are expected to meet their academic goals or else be sanctioned for failure (Leithwood et al., 2010).

Day (2014) cautions that quick fixes in such schools can only lead to temporary recoveries, and that sustained change will prove harder to achieve. Research suggests there are some consistent strategies on school turnaround which can renew teaching
and learning conditions if practised in low-performing schools. For example, changing teachers’ actions, beliefs and perceptions (Fullan, 2010), focusing on teachers’ professional development, encouraging parent participation, gaining access to resources (Liu, 2020), forming professional learning communities, building a collaborative school culture (Jacobson, 2011), connecting schools to the community (Pashiardis et al., 2011), innovative curricula and implementing accountability measures (Butler, 2012) have all proven effective. Importantly, the evidence shows all these strategies are strongly influenced by school leadership.

Effective school leadership practices are critical to successful school turnaround (Yoon & Barton, 2019). The starting point for school turnaround is an experienced, stable and responsible principal who serves as an activator for change (Liu, 2020). Steiner et al. (2008) suggested four core competencies of successful turnaround principals: the motivation to achieve end results, the ability to strongly influence others in achieving these results, problem-solving abilities and high confidence in leading.

Moreover, successful turnaround principals are able to articulate their vision clearly (Chapman & Muijs, 2013) and create a sense of collective vision (Jacobson, 2011) among their teachers. Other practices include shared leadership and joint decision making at all levels (Harris & Jones, 2019), the combined use of transformational, instructional and transactional leadership styles (Hitt & Tucker, 2016), coaching for school improvement (King & Bouchard, 2011) and developing high levels of organisational trust (Martin & Samels, 2009). However, studies on the characteristics of turnaround leaders within Asia remain relatively limited and need further exploration.

MALAYSIA

The Malaysian education system has experienced tremendous transformation since the country gained its independence in 1957. However, Malaysia has performed significantly lower in international assessments such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) compared to its Asian counterparts such as Singapore or Hong Kong (Harris et al., 2018; Malaysian Ministry of Education, 2013).

One study states the cause of low-performing schools in Malaysia to be insufficient and varying investment (Harris et al., 2018). Many schools in remote areas have limited educational resources and are located in areas of acute disadvantage. In 2010 the Trust Schools programme was introduced, as a private–public partnership school transformation model (based on charter schools in the United States and academies in England) with the aim to produce better student outcomes and improve underperforming state schools’ performance over the long term (Harris et al., 2018).

In 2012, the Ministry of Education introduced a major policy called ‘Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025’ to generate transformation and improvement in Malaysia’s education system (Jones et al., 2015). Among the 11 ‘key shifts’ for transformation and change, ‘shift 5’ concerns the quality of principal leadership. It highlights the strategic intention to equip all schools with high-performing school leaders who are the pivotal players in improving student outcomes.

Then in 2017 the Ministry of Education introduced the Malaysian Education Quality Standard, which is a self-assessment tool to help school leaders identify areas for improvement in their schools (NSTP Team, 2018). The self-assessment tool covers five standards: leadership, organisation management, curriculum and students’ affairs management, teaching and learning processes and students’ development. School leaders are expected to assess their current school performance and set their key
performance indicators accordingly. In 2018, the Ministry embarked on a more focused and concerted effort to improve failing or struggling schools with the ‘School Leadership Spike’ programme, where 41 outstanding school leaders are placed in underperforming schools (ibid). These school leaders are expected to utilise their skills, expertise and experience to turn around the schools’ low performance.

**METHODOLOGY**

In the following case study, three previously low-performing secondary and two primary public schools from Pahang, Selangor and Terengganu in Malaysia are examined. The schools were selected based on their rapid improvement in their reputation, academic ranking and community involvement. The selected schools could be termed ‘turnaround schools’ since they have secured significant improvements in academic attainment for students within the Malaysian school public examinations. These exams are called the *Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah* (Primary School Evaluation Test) and *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysian Certificate of Education) for secondary schools over a three-year period. Semi-structured interviews were held with five school principals, with different themes assigned to their comments. Four major themes emerged from the data. Names of schools and principals are being kept anonymous.

Information about the principals is presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Demographics of the school principals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Year of appointment</th>
<th>Experience as a principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1 / School 1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2 / School 2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3 / School 3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4 / School 4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5 / School 5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDINGS

In this section, we provide the schools’ academic attainment data in Malaysia’s school public examinations over a three-year period.

It’s important to note a change in the *Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah* (Primary School Evaluation Test) format in 2018 with the introduction of HOTs (higher-order thinking skills). Thus, this lowered the third year academic achievements of both primary schools (see school 2 and school 5).

Similarly, there was also a change in the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysian Certificate of Education) question format in 2015, again affecting the third year academic achievements of secondary schools (see school 4). Otherwise, we can see that overall the schools achieved improvements in students’ academic attainment, particularly in the first two years.

THEMES

Below are the main themes from the interview data with illustrative quotes. The themes are:

1. changing attitudes and setting expectations
2. leading by example and building trusting relationships
3. empowering teachers to lead
4. creating a conducive school climate.

1. Changing attitudes and setting expectations
The principals noted that a clear vision and goal for the school are extremely important, and these should be adapted to the school context. The attitudes of teachers, students and parents were seen as very important. Each of the below quotes is from a principal at each of the improved schools in the graph above.

I’m very determined and I will not take things as the status quo. I will push boundaries. So, in short, I will look at all possibilities, I do whatever I can to help improve the school. I will not allow teachers to say, ‘it is just not possible’, ‘I can just do this much’, No! You can do more. It is not just this much. [P1]
When I first joined the school, I opened their horizon. I told everybody in the school that every one of us have potential to improve and become better. I study the environment for three months. Then, I came out with the strategic planning with consent from all my teachers. [P3]

I always set a target. I inform my teachers of the target. Where are we now and what we must achieve. We have to set goals and teachers have to understand our mission and vision. [P4]

When I first entered the school, my first challenge was the teachers’ attitude. I analysed their key performance indicator scores from the last two years and realised they were weak in their pedagogies. So, I wanted to change it. They were in their comfort zone. Teachers were late to school. I introduced the punch card system. They complained. But I was strict. They must follow the mandatory working hours. I told them there are a few things I can be flexible about, not this. [P1]

One principal said she did a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of her school over the last two years and developed a three-year strategic plan:

We must have a target. Monthly and yearly target. Short- and long-term goals. [...] We decided the first year must be focused on the teachers. Improving their pedagogy skills and content knowledge. If teachers are of high quality, they can enhance our students’ potential and talents. Second year will be on quality student outcomes and the third year will be on improving parents’ involvement and engagement. [P5]

Two principals revealed their middle leaders were reluctant and resistant to change:

I need to tackle this senior teacher first. They have many followers. Whenever they said something, all the teachers will listen to them diligently. [P3]

I remember I actually got rid of some people who were just pillars. I don’t care how long they have been holding that post. If they are not doing their job, I will just remove them and replace with another who were willing to work with me. It was tough though. What is important is you do the right thing and you hope when people begin to see change, they will work alongside with you. [P1]

All the principals spoke about moving staff towards a ‘students first’ mentality in order to drive higher expectations across the school.

One principal said:

I would say, the focus will be the student. The students are the soul of the school, the life of the school. So, you must value them, you must see them as important and you must figure out what is lacking, what needs to be done and do the right thing! [P1]

Two principals made clear the focus should not just be on students’ academic performance, but their holistic development in extracurricular activities such as sports:

I develop the talents in the school. We groom talents from young. Year by year, with the programmes that we plan, we managed to become the champion for district level in many competitions. [P3]
We had never achieved much in sports. So, I emphasised our target of competing at national and international level sports competitions. I said we need to create a programme to achieve this. So, last year we won 10 gold medals at state level. [P4]

The principals all reported being persistent in their planning and monitoring of daily school life. They were determined to see their visions and goals turned into reality.

2. Leading by example and building trusting relationships
The principals all signed up to the notion that leadership approaches should not be top-down. They believed they should lead by example, as much as through direct instructions:

Don’t behave like you are the head, you are right on top and you are unreachable, and you cannot be approachable. You need to come down to their level, walk with them and talk with them, eat with them, move with them, and do things with them! You cannot just tell people what to do when you don’t do it yourself and sometimes you even have to dirty your own hands. And so, when people see the principal is doing it, they will also do it. [P1]

I believe as a leader I have to give a good example. If you asked them to come early, you must come early too. If you want them to be punctual, you must be punctual too. For example, if we have training for the soccer team, I will join students for warm up. If we have a cross-country competition, I will join their training and run with them. So, the teachers can see that if the principal can do it, they will do it. [P3]

We have to be involved with the teachers. Not just give instructions. Then when they have issues, they will come and talk to me. I always emphasise when we are on top, don’t forget the people underneath. [P4]

However, the principals all said they potentially faced conflicts with teachers due to clashing personalities and expectations. Observation was a key tool for these leaders to establish how best to motivate their staff and strengthen their skills as turnaround teachers.

You see, firstly, you don’t know exactly how much people can do because you are new. You are new to the environment and yet at the same time, you cannot waste too much time to find out. So you need to be really observing, you need to keep ears open, your eyes open, you need to talk to people, you need to identify with them and get their response and from there know what kind of heartbeat they have. [P1]

First, we must look at how things are being done, whether the teachers have a programme. So, I asked the teachers to continue their programme and I observed how the programme was run and the impact of the programme. We can’t just change the programme. It will make the teachers angry. If I see that the programme does not achieve its KPI, then I’ll give ideas how to do it. I will coach and mentor the teachers with my senior assistant. [P4]
I studied my teachers. I gave them an individual task. From their answer, I identified their strength and weakness. Then, I created a programme called one teacher one niche area. If I see a teacher is weak in one area, I will pair with another who has strength in that area. So, all my teachers are happy.

This observation allowed principals to build trust with their teachers. Many of them developed specific strategies around building long-lasting, productive relationships with staff.

I created four values based on our school name called PORT. P is for positive, O for optimistic, R for responsible and T for talented. I told my teachers I cannot work alone. I need all of them. So, that won the teachers’ heart. Then, it was quite easy to move on.

When teachers work on Saturdays, they bring their children along. Some teachers ask for permission to go home early due to a family problem. So, we must give and take. It’s important that we trust our teachers. If we trust them, they’ll trust us more.

I emphasise a humanistic approach with my teachers. I build a strong relationship with them. I want to know their families. Their family backgrounds. So, in future if they need to attend to their families during school hours, I can decide better as I know their family background. For example, a sick husband or a child with disability. I won’t scold or get upset. Without a strong relationship, I won’t know my teachers’ heart.

Principals reported that through having a more trusting relationship with their school leader, teachers gradually became more proactive about school-wide improvement programmes.

I always consider my school as a family, and I the head of the family. So, I must make sure my teachers are OK I don’t want my teachers to form cliques, with a team A and team B. Teachers must work together and enhance their potential. We do not want to have any misunderstandings and create an uncomfortable working relationship.

For me the teachers are now more open. We are like a family. The teachers are free to come and talk to me whatever problem they have. Discuss any project. And that is the culture. We have a lot of discussions.

3. Empowering teachers to lead
The principals reported they would allow their teachers to plan, facilitate and evaluate the effectiveness of their own leadership, teaching and learning in the classrooms. As such, principals encouraged staff to feel they were the key to change.

Together, we can bring about change. Nothing is impossible. We must work together. The principal and teachers. We are the factors of change. And if they don’t see change possible, the students and parents would not want to cooperate!

An effective technique for driving school improvement was spotting teachers with the capacity to lead others and spread their expertise. By giving these staff more responsibility, principals ensured improvement was led at all levels. The strategy also
established a clearer chain of command and support, rather than concentrating all authority with the principal.

If you know there are people who can bring about change, embrace them and get them on your side and use them and give them responsibilities which they can manage. And so, if they can manage a certain task, you enlarge their circle of influence, you empower them to do more. [P1]

I also asked teachers to become paper examiners for public exams. They will learn a lot when they mark papers. The students will benefit from their expertise. [P3]

We have a head of department who we considered as the subject matter expert. They have been teaching that particular subject for more than 15 years. These teachers, they have experience and for those young teachers who need to be guided, I put them together in a group. So, they can share the materials or experience regarding that subject matter. And when they have problems, they know who to consult. [P3]

One principal shared the importance of consulting with the senior leadership team so that they feel part of the decisions being made.

I analysed the annual performance of each teacher. Then, I consult my senior assistants on who is fit for certain positions. I hear their opinion. I then called for a meeting with all my senior assistants and heads of department. We talked about each teacher and what portfolios they could hold. So, through discussion, we created a management team. [P4]

Teachers were also motivated to drive school improvement by, in some cases, being made more accountable for student learning outcomes.

We created various programmes to improve student performance. So, for each subject, the teacher needs to develop a strategic plan for improvement. The teachers must note down and keep a record of what are their students’ performance before and after a programme. Teachers will then need to analyse the students’ performance and prepare a Gantt chart. [P4]

All principals held the view that shared leadership enables school-wide improvements. Hence, these principals communicated a sense of appreciation and respect towards teachers, whom they trusted as a team. As a result, they reported that teachers were more willing to change their attitudes and approaches in a way which benefited students.

4. Creating a conducive school climate
Alongside bringing staff onboard, principals also had to win over parents who appeared unengaged with their children’s education. These schools are largely attended by families from low socio-economic settings.

Economically they are down. And some of them, they become demotivated and they don’t see the importance of basic education. Usually, if the parents are like that, the children will have the same problem. [P2]
Some of them do work to help their father, part time work. There are cases where instead of coming for extra classes, they would rather help their parents to find money. You know, that kind of thinking. They cannot see the importance of education. So that is another challenge that I face. Quite hard for us to motivate them and change their thinking. Very difficult because it goes back to the family where they come from. [P2]

Alongside students’ low motivation to learn, principals reported that those from difficult backgrounds were behaviourally challenging:

You know they live in a dense house or flat. So, when my teachers told me that their students have discipline problem, I always tell the teachers, see the students’ background. So, when we investigate, we found these students lack attention and love. They have no one to talk to and are neglected. Some of them are even neglected in their basic needs as they don’t have enough food. [P2]

After establishing these issues, principals decided on a strategy of hope and motivation through outreach, care and love. Punishment was not immediately handed out.

Students come from a low social economic background; everything is lacking. [...] School uniforms were torn. They cannot afford a decent school bag, even stationeries were not available to them. They come in torn shoes and then you cannot just punish them. To me, it is so unfair to punish them for not coming in proper school uniform. You should reach out to them and help them. See what you can do to help them. Plant hope in them. [P1]

I build a relationship with my students. I don’t portray myself as a principal. I asked my students to call me ‘mother’. So now they’re close to me. Every morning they will come and greet me. For the weak students, I take initiative to know their family background. I then discuss with my teachers on these students on how best to help them. [P5]

One principal prioritised visiting students in their home if indicators revealed they were struggling:

We monitor their attendance. If we see their attendance is poor, my senior assistant and me will go to their houses, including the subject teachers who go to see what the problem is. This makes the student feel that somebody cares and loves them. [P3]

Alongside an empathetic understanding of their contexts, principals said it was important to nevertheless drive an environment of high expectations and academic achievement.

During the school assembly, I call a few excellent students to share study tips with the students. We encourage Q&A and students can ask questions. This creates a competitive feeling among them. We also have a lot of student-led motivation and improvement programmes. [P4]
Due to limited financial resources, principals looked for contributions from the more financially stable parents to support the schools’ development. This was especially difficult because of the low socio-economic setting. Principals appealed for donations from private entities, public entities and Parent Teacher Associations to improve their school facilities.

*I start off with the parents first. Reach out to parents. And then I reach out to the people around. The businesspeople around the community. They begin to do whatever they can to help. That was very effective because soon, I had funds rolling in to do many things for the school.* [P1]

In turn, a better school environment encouraged more parents – particularly from more affluent backgrounds – to send their children there. This then increases donations to the school.

*You see when the school is broken, shattered, you will never attract the rich, parents will say ‘why should I put my kids right there?’ So, you have to change and let them see the success in the school and then rich parents from the nearby vicinity will start placing their kids here. So, what does it mean to have a rich population in the school? Funds will come in. Donations will come in. They will do their part to help. All these factors are linked.* [P1]

Another principal said they introduced a new income-generation strategy at their school:

*I renovated the school field. We rent it to the community there. Everybody loves to play soccer in our field. We have institutions and factories renting our field for their football games or tele-match. So, from there, we get money.* [P3]

These principals engaged parents and other important external stakeholders to provide tangible resources (financial donations, learning materials, etc.) and intangible resources (ideas, technical expertise, etc.), so that the wider community is directly involved and invested in school improvement.

**STRATEGIES OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL LEADERS**

Scholars have tried to examine what successful school leaders do across contexts (Clarke & O’Donoghue, 2016; Hallinger, 2018; Harris, Jones & Adams, 2016). Certain approaches would seem better suited for school turnaround depending on the circumstances.

From our data, it is clear the principals had different approaches for school transformation. No principal in the study faced exactly the same leadership challenges in the same way. As experienced principals, each had their own philosophies and personal values for guiding their problem solving and decisions.

Nevertheless, we can compile a list of overarching characteristics and strategies these school leaders adopted to successfully bring about school improvement (Table 2). We would encourage other principals to use this knowledge base for driving effective school improvement.
Table 2: 
Five characteristics and strategies of successful school leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A clear, inclusive vision for the school</td>
<td>Observe the school climate first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Set visions, goals and expectations clearly and be determined to achieve these</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Show leadership by example, not just by direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Set a long-term strategic plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be flexible to change according to needs and circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be inspired to see difficult times as an opportunity for positive change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Handle conflicts tactfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful trust and challenge for staff</td>
<td>Skilfully change the attitudes of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Build trusting relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empower teachers with tasks according to their expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be truthful and confront teachers where needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instil collaborative teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultivate interdependent working environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have a ‘give and take’ mindset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drive a ‘students first’ mentality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appreciate the contributions of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention to processes and structures for the organisation</td>
<td>Monitor and change daily school activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultivate shared leadership and joint decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create a conducive learning climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spot organisational gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paint positive murals and mottos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship build with external stakeholders</td>
<td>Proactively approach parents to contribute to school development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Network with parents who are more social-economically able to contribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Get funds from community by appeal and writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work closely with Parent Teacher Associations (PTA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High expectations, high support culture for students</td>
<td>Create healthy competition among students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on students’ holistic and character development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivate rather than simply punish students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Care and love for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Get to know students’ family background</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although these leadership characteristics and strategies are not automatically generalisable to other schools, the principals were united in their belief that an effective school head is one who constantly looks for improvements. They are persistent in innovating better teaching approaches to improve students’ outcomes.

The chapter puts into context the challenges faced by school leaders in improving low-performing schools and illuminates their strategies in creating the conditions for lasting improvement and change. Two implications can be drawn for any attempts on school improvement and system transformation in contexts like Nepal.

CONCLUSION

The account of school leaders’ strategies for school transformation presented in this chapter are indicative rather than definitive.

First, there is growing evidence that schools are moving towards collaborative and distributed attributes of leadership (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2020). Fullan (2009) suggests that school leaders should
not lead as a lone ranger but rather develop and empower other leaders in the school. Then school leaders and their leadership team can together develop an understanding of their school context, particularly their students’ socio-economic background and current academic achievement. This allows the school leadership team to detect and manage problems early and to target resources for improvement.

Second, all strategies for successful school leadership must be interpreted in light of the practical constraints (and opportunities) that arise from the leader’s context. This requires school leaders to draw upon their craft knowledge; they must understand their system challenges and adapt these strategies to best suit their own context (Adams & Muthiah, 2020).

Alma Harris has held professorial posts at the University of Warwick, Institute of Education at University College London, University of Malaya, the University of Bath and the University of Swansea. Since 2009, she has worked for the World Bank on programmes aimed at supporting schools in Russia. Dr Harris is a past president of the International Congress for School Effectiveness and School Improvement.

Michelle Jones is currently Head of Swansea University School of Education and Associate Professor of Leadership and Professional Learning. She has previously held academic positions at the University of Bath, UK, and the University of Malaya, where she was the Deputy Director of the Institute of Educational Leadership. Jones is a Research Fellow of the Hong Kong Institute of Education and a Senior Research Fellow at the National Research University, Moscow Higher School of Economics.

Bambang Sumintono worked as a chemistry teacher for seven years in Lombok, Indonesia. He completed his Master’s in Educational Administration at Flinders University, Australia, in 2001 and doctoral study at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, in 2007. Since 2014, he has been a lecturer and researcher at the Faculty of Education, University of Malaya.

Noni Nadiana Md Yusoff is currently pursuing a Master’s of Education at the University of Malaya. She obtained her degree in TESL from University of Exeter. Her current field is leadership for learning and teacher professional development.
REFERENCES


ABOUT THE PROJECT

CONNECTING CLASSROOMS THROUGH GLOBAL LEARNING

Connecting Classrooms works with schools around the world to help young people develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to make a positive contribution now and in the future. The British Council delivers this programme in partnership with the UK government Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

Connecting Classrooms offers a range of free downloadable classroom resources available to all teachers across the world. These resources, based on the United Nations Global Goals for Sustainable Development, have been designed to adapt to any curriculum. They offer creative and engaging ideas to bring knowledge and core skills to life in the classroom and inspire students to take action on global issues. Find out about our global learning resources designed to address topics which are high on the agenda for governments around the world here:

connectingclassrooms.britishcouncil.org/resources/global-learning-resources

Connecting Classrooms offers free online professional development around core skills and international collaboration, helping teachers and school leaders to prepare young people for life and work in a globalised economy. The programme also supports partnerships between schools around the world with schools in the UK to share knowledge, skills and experience with other teachers. More details on how to find a school partner can be found here:

connectingclassrooms.britishcouncil.org/partner-with-schools/find-partner
This British Council publication on developing successful schools in Nepal provides on-the-ground insights into curriculum, pedagogy and school leadership. Through case studies from researchers, teachers and practitioners within the country, alongside reviews of the research literature from international academics, the reader comes away with a deeper understanding of the opportunities, challenges and best practice unfolding in the Nepalese school system. The publication opens with a chapter on core skills in the curriculum and moves on to four main chapters covering: employability skills; international perspectives on learning; what works in school leadership and attributes of school leaders. Finally, nine grassroots case studies are presented from classrooms in Nepal and Asia, drawing on the authors’ findings and with recommendations for the future. The publication can be read both as an inspirational handbook for school leaders wishing to drive improvement for staff and students, and as an information booklet for the interested observer.

The insights and recommendations embedded in its pages reflect a committed endeavour by both practitioners and researchers to drive for better outcomes for Nepali students. More than ever, digital literacy, critical thought and confidence in both local and international contexts are being touted as crucial capabilities, a call heightened by the context of the global 2020 pandemic. School leavers are being required to adapt to virtual employment practices and find innovative ways to break into difficult labour markets, for which researchers assert they need a high-quality, challenging education which prepares them to make their mark in a rapidly changing world.