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Teacher management in a decentralised school context in Nepal: Fuelling tension and dissent?

Peshal Khanal*

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This article explores the issues and concerns of Nepalese teachers in relation to Gaynor’s (1998) three models of teacher management (administrative, grassroots and alternative), constructed in the context of decentralisation reform around the world. The article suggests that the existing teacher management policies in Nepal are problematic and controversial, embracing both the administrative and grassroots models of teacher management and maintaining both the centralised and decentralised policies of teacher selection, promotion and financing. With problems similar to those of many developing nations in Africa, decentralisation of teacher management results in growing division and hierarchy among teaching staff; and favouritism, cronyism and corruption at the local level. The lack of equitable distribution of qualified teachers across regions and schools is another concern. The article concludes that the decentralisation of teacher management is problematic particularly in the countries where a dual approach to teacher management has been adopted and where the political, economic, institutional, technical and educational systems need to respond to the specific characteristics and needs of schools and communities as a whole.

Keywords: decentralisation; school governance; teacher management; Nepal

Introduction

Education decentralisation has been widely advocated as a part of public sector reform in both developed and developing countries (Abu-Duhou 1999; World Bank 2008). Considerable variations exist as to what aspects of education are to be decentralised, to what degree and to which levels, however (Fiske 1996; Barrera-Osorio et al. 2009). Among such variations, the question of how best to manage teachers is receiving much attention among educational planners, both at the national and supranational levels (Gaynor 1998; McGinn and Welsh 1999; Barrera-Osorio et al. 2009; Lugaz and De Grauwe 2010). With regard to teacher management in a decentralised governance context, most countries seek to maintain a balance between central control and local autonomy. Central governments commonly retain control over teaching qualifications, standards and licensing, while authority over teacher recruitment, promotion, transfer and appraisal is transferred to provincial, district or school levels (Gaynor 1998). Only a few countries have devolved a full range of teacher management authority to the local level (Power et al. 1997; Abu-Duhou 1999; Barrera-Osorio et al. 2009).

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Written in a broader policy context of decentralisation, this article explores the issues and concerns of Nepalese teachers in relation to Gaynor’s (1998) three models of teacher management (administrative, grassroots and alternative), constructed in the context of decentralisation reform around the world. Nepal made certain policy amendments in 2001 and 2002 embracing decentralisation and community participation, and devolved school management authority, including the authority to hire teachers, to school committees (Carney et al. 2007; Carney and Bista 2009; Khanal 2010a, 2010b). These amendments did not entirely replace the central mechanism for teacher appointment, promotion and transfer, however. Consequently, a parallel system of teacher management exists at the present time; centralised policy for the teachers appointed by the government in ‘permanent’ teaching positions, and decentralised policy for the locally appointed teachers by School Management Committees (SMCs). This article considers the issues and concerns of both groups of teachers and looks particularly into how these policies have brought about changes in various approaches to teacher management, including selection, appointment, promotion, financing, and incentives in relation to the three different models of teacher management.

The evidence for this derives from case studies of three schools that differ considerably in terms of their community characteristics and student composition. These schools also represent the three distinct topographical regions of Nepal; Mountain, Hill and Terai (lowland). The first school (A) is located in the Kathmandu valley in the Hill region, with a high literacy rate and per capita income. The second school (B) lies in a semi-urban community of eastern Terai, with a relatively modest level of literacy and income. The third school (C) is located in a rural community in the Mountain region, with a low literacy and income level. While the first two schools have a mixed ethnic composition of students, more than 90% students in school C belong to a single ethnicity – Gurung, a caste of Janajati. A wide range of techniques, including unstructured interviews, observations and focus groups were employed to collect empirical evidence. In addition, a field diary was maintained by the author to keep an account of field observations and immediate reflections on them.

The discussions commence with an outline of the historical context of school decentralisation in Nepal and proceed with a review of the dominant literature on teacher management in the context of the decentralised governance of education. Subsequently, a brief discussion on the existing policy issues of teacher management in Nepal is presented. Drawing on the field data, the next section analyses the issues and concerns of teachers in relation to the three models of teacher management and looks into policy implications at the local level.

Centralisation and decentralisation reform in education

Formal schooling in Nepal traces its history back to 1854 when the then Prime Minister established a school in Kathmandu with the aim of educating the children of the ruling elite. It took more than a century to begin the systematic development of school education, however. From 1846 to 1950, the country was under the hereditary rule of the Rana clan, which reserved education as a prerogative of the ruling elites and virtually barred commoners from formal schooling. As a result, Nepal’s educational development during this period remained extremely limited, with a mere 2% literacy rate by the end of the Rana period (Wood 1965). The downfall of the
Rana oligarchy in 1950 brought a new dawn of democracy in the country and moves towards public schooling began with the strong involvement of communities in establishing, managing and financing schools. The role of the government was limited to giving approval to open schools, distributing annual and occasional grants-in-aid, and carrying out school inspections to check that schools were functioning within the broader guidelines and standards set by the government. Each school had a School Management Committee (SMC), consisting of parents, community leaders, founders and donors. The SMC was responsible for teacher recruitment and management, determination of fees, financial management, physical development, mobilisation of resources and general supervision and monitoring of schools. A locally appointed head teacher managed the school and oversaw the day-to-day operations. Since teachers were hired and fired by the SMC, they were accountable to parents and communities rather than to the district and central officials of the Ministry of Education.

After a decade of democracy, the King sacked the elected government in 1961 and introduced a partyless Panchayat system. The Panchayat government introduced an educational reform in 1971 – the National Education Systematic Plan – with the aim of strengthening ‘national integration’ by focusing on unity around a common language, religion and culture, and instilling faith in the Crown through politics, media and the school curriculum (Shah 1993; Onta 1996). These goals were pursued under a highly centralised and regulated system, and the government took over the overall authority of school management from local communities. Although each school under this reform had an Assistance Committee at the local level, such committees functioned as ancillary bodies of the government to ensure that the schools complied with the government’s broader policy guidelines and regulations.

The political movement in 1990 restored the multiparty democracy, overthrowing the 30-year long partyless Panchayat regime. The restoration of democracy, alongside the supportive role of international organisations, provided the country with sufficient political and resources backup to move towards new policy approaches such as ‘decentralisation’, ‘community empowerment’ and ‘inclusive democracy’. As a result, the government embarked on policy reform embracing decentralisation in the public sector. In 1998, the government promulgated the Local Self-Governance Act with the aim of devolving centrally controlled authority to locally elected governments.

The decentralisation of education in practice started three years later when the parliament amended the Education Act (seventh amendment, 2001), paving the way for greater reforms in school education. The Act includes the provision entitled ‘School management responsibility can be taken’ with the clarification that School Management Committees can take on the management responsibility of state schools by signing a formal agreement with the district education offices. This new approach to community schooling made the SMCs responsible for the overall management of schools. Unlike the earlier provision that meant SMC members were nominated by the district education offices, the amendment of the Act formalised the election of parents to the majority of SMC posts. In addition to delegating the authority to make regular administrative and managerial decisions, the Act provided local governments or SMCs with other major responsibilities, such as appointing and evaluating head teachers; appointing teachers in new teacher quotas; entering into agreements with any government and non-governmental organisations for the
benefit of the school; forming subcommittees and supporting and coordinating them in their business mainly in the areas of academic standards, social mobilisation for sending children to school, sports and extracurricular activities, resource mobilisation, physical construction, and monitoring and evaluation; and forming bye-laws for educational, financial and personnel management of schools and implementing them after approval by a meeting of parents (MOE 2002).

The pace of transferring school management to local communities accelerated with the financial and technical assistance of the World Bank and other aid donors. In 2003, for example, the government introduced the Community School Support Project with the financial support of the World Bank. As the major aim of this project, the government invited SMCs to take over school management on a voluntary basis. To encourage the transfer of school management, a substantial one-off financial incentive was provided. After the termination of this project in 2008, the government incorporated the agenda of transferring school management into its major reform programme, the School Sector Reform Programme (2009-2015), which aims to reform school education in view of Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals for education. This seven year programme has been funded by various donor organisations and countries, including the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the European Union, AusAid, USAID, the UK Department for International Development, UNICEF, Finland and Norway. Under this programme, the transfer of school management to local communities is underway. The government statistics show that until mid-2008 nearly a third of the country’s 27,000 state schools had been transferred to local management (DOE 2008).

From the above discussion it is evident that educational policies in the past remained greatly under the influence of the particular ideologies that steered the political transformation in the country. The whole historical trajectory of Nepal shows that the more the government took a unitary approach to governance, the more stringently it held authority at the centre. In contrast, a democratic approach to governance widened the role of sub-national governments and organisations in decision-making processes, as well as increased the government’s reliance on international assistance. Taking 1846 as a point of departure, when the Rana rulers took over political power, the country’s politics appear to run through both of these approaches (Table 1) leading to the policy swing from centralisation to decentralisation.

Models of teacher management and the case of Nepal

A number of research papers (Dyer 2005; Mpokosa and Ndaruhatse 2008; UNESCO 2009; Lugaz and De Grauwe 2010), based on studies of teacher management in various country contexts, explore a range of practices of managing teachers (recruitment, promotion, transfer) in the context of the decentralised governance of education. This article makes particular use of Gaynor’s (1998) typology of teacher management, because of its relevance to the comparative dimension of this article. Gaynor synthesises various practices and approaches to decentralised teacher management and categorises them into three distinct and comparable models: administrative, grassroots and alternative.

The administrative model is one in which the authority of teacher management is transferred to the lower levels of the government system. According to the nature and degree of authority transferred to the lower levels, this form of decentralisation
can be described as ‘deconcentration’. Certain control is retained by the Ministry of Education, but some authority and several responsibilities are transferred to other levels of the government system, but ‘within a tight framework that limits authority’ (Lugaz and De Grauwe 2010, 24). The central ministry normally retains control over setting standards for teachers, deciding salary ranges and allocating budgets to lower levels of the administration. The decision to employ teachers through the independent teaching service commission or other similar independent bodies often takes place centrally, but the responsibility for teacher appointment, promotion, discipline, transfer, dismissal and leave is devolved to regional or district levels of the government system. The lower units of government are responsible for organising in-service training, providing pedagogical support to teachers and monitoring standards. The local governments, such as municipalities or village development councils may be given such responsibilities as paying salaries and advising regional or district offices on discipline and promotion. The administrative model is mostly used in countries where education decentralisation is limited to administrative units of the government system. Some analysts argue that decentralisation of this nature, by which the authority is largely controlled at the centre operates within the system of bureaucratic centralism (Lauglo 1995).

The grassroots model devolves several aspects of teacher management to community representatives or local school bodies ‘that can act independently’ (Hanson 2006, 10), although there are differences in ‘the approach to teachers depending on the values and focus of the reform’ (Gaynor 1998, 7). Two distinct variations can be observed within this model, which can be placed on two opposite poles of a
continuum. The first is the ‘free-market’ model that gives school boards significant power to make decisions about teachers. Teachers thus need to be accountable to school boards or similar decision-making bodies. The other is the ‘democratic’ model which, in principle, is based on partnership. In this model, teachers, community leaders and parents enjoy almost equal responsibility and power in decision-making. The fundamental difference between the two lies in the fact that the former ‘tends to diminish the role of local elected bodies’ (Gaynor 1998, 8), as in the Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in the United Kingdom (Ball 1990; Turner 2004), while the latter ‘retains a role for local authorities’ (Gaynor 1998, 8), as in the education reform in Sweden (Björklund et al. 2005). At the school level, the school head, usually working in close liaison with the school council or a similar committee, plays an active role in the selection, promotion and evaluation of teachers. The school board or local bodies usually decide teacher salaries. The central government is generally responsible for setting policies on qualifications and teaching standards, pedagogical supervision and other legislative frameworks.

The alternative or small-scale model is an ad hoc or temporary arrangement, often made when schools are established and run by a non-governmental organisation (NGO), religious institution or community, and exists alongside mainstream education. In this model, the school or the institution that establishes the school has an overall responsibility for making decisions on teachers’ issues, including their recruitment, salary, discipline, appraisal and promotion. Standards for teaching qualifications, pay scales, student-teacher ratios and pedagogical supervision are determined locally, often set independently of national standards or norms. The central government may establish certain legislation for regulating these schools, but the legislation provides a certain leeway for them to set standards according to the financial and institutional capacity of the school or the community. This model is generally used when there is under-investment in public schooling and when the government wishes to share the responsibility for state schooling with local communities, NGOs or other social institutions.

Using Gaynor’s (1998) classification, it is possible to discern that the Nepalese approach to teacher management falls into both the administrative and grassroots categories, applying largely to the centrally and locally appointed teachers respectively. In Nepal, the central government sets policy on qualifications, standards and deployment of teachers, and hands over certain responsibilities to lower systems of the government and school management bodies. The responsibility for teacher licensing, selection and promotion rests with the central Teachers Service Commission (TSC). The government’s regional and district offices are responsible for the appointment and transfer of teachers. They are also given responsibility for appraising teachers and grading their performance for the purposes of promotion. All these provisions are largely applied to the centrally appointed teachers in permanent teaching positions, however.

After the amendment of the Education Act in 2001, the responsibility for hiring teachers was handed over to the SMCs, although schools require the prior permission of the district education offices to advertise posts and issue appointment letters to ‘successful’ candidates. According to the existing legal provisions, each school constitutes a teacher selection committee which, under the selection criteria set by the Ministry of Education, advertises the post, carries out written and oral examinations, and selects candidate(s) on ‘merit’. The government has made a decision to provide schools with temporary teaching positions (Rahat quota), with a fixed
salary component; that is, the salary is unaffected by the annual salary increments afforded to government employees. In addition, the government has recently intro-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher categories</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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| Permanent teacher  | Teachers appointed by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) to government teaching positions. In general, the government creates teaching positions and fills them with the candidates who get through the TSC selection test. These teachers enjoy full government salaries, annual increments, provident funds and pensions. They get regular promotion following the recommendation of the TSC. They enjoy various kinds of leave, including paid study leave and unpaid leave up to five years. More than 40% of the country’s 200,000 state school teachers fall into this category.
| Temporary teacher  | Teachers appointed to government positions by the School Management Committee (SMC), but yet to sit or get through the TSC selection test. If the TSC is unable to make a regular advertisement, teachers are appointed locally to government positions. In practice, the TSC advertisement is infrequent. Currently, more than 30,000 teachers belong to this category. Teachers in this category enjoy a full government salary, but do not receive annual increments, provident funds and pensions. They are not entitled to promotions and study or unpaid leave. The SMC is responsible for the selection of temporary teachers and the district education offices are responsible for the appointment and transfer of teachers.
| Rahat teacher      | Teachers hired by the SMC to fixed-term government positions. For more than 10 years, the government has not created new teaching positions in state schools. Instead, as part of the funding of the ongoing projects such as Education for All and School Sector Reform Programme (SSRP), it has created temporary positions, commonly known as Rahat Darbandi (relief quota). Teachers in this category are appointed by the SMC. They get a fixed salary, normally less than the pay scale enjoyed by the permanent and temporary teachers.
| PCF teacher        | Teachers appointed on the Per Child Funding (PCF) budget scheme. As a recent approach to demand side financing, the government has introduced the PCF scheme. Under this scheme, for every new child enrolled, the school receives a fixed sum of money. On this basis, the SMC hires teachers on a contractual basis. The PCF teaching positions remain as long as the school retains the number of students required for the PCF budget contributions.
| Local teacher      | Teachers appointed by the SMC on local budgets. Despite the supply of teachers by the government, state schools in Nepal normally have a shortage of teachers in proportion to their number of students. In such circumstances, the SMC recruits teachers on local budgets, mostly generated through voluntary donations and fund-raising. The SMC has overall responsibility for setting policy on hiring, firing, appraisal and promotion of local teachers. Teachers in this category are commonly low-paid, and their turnover is very high.

Note: Author’s illustration.
duced a new system of funding – per child funding (PCF) – by which schools receive additional budget contributions, based on the number of surplus enrolments, which is used for the salaries of local teachers. If this budget is insufficient, the SMC is responsible for generating resources locally. Among various teachers in a school, those appointed to government positions are generally regarded as regular teachers and those appointed locally on a fixed-term and contractual basis are treated as para-teachers4. The Table 2 presents a short description of the various categories of teacher in state schools in Nepal.

Impact of teacher management policy at the local level

Division and hierarchy

It is commonplace in many developing nations in Africa and Asia to adopt both administrative and grassroots approaches to teacher management, resulting in division and hierarchy among teaching staff in schools. A comprehensive study (Lugaz and De Grauwe, 2010) in four African countries – Benin, Mali, Guinea and Senegal – illustrates that each of these countries has two categories of teacher; teachers with civil servant status and locally appointed teachers. There are also different types of locally appointed teacher, such as volunteer, contract and community teachers. The management of civil servant teaching staff is highly centralised, whereas the responsibility for managing other types of teacher is handed over to local education offices or school committees. Due to the differential treatment of different categories of teacher, the problem of division and hierarchy among teachers in state schools is prevalent across these countries.

Similar to the cases discussed in the African study, the dual approach to teacher management (administrative and grassroots) has created a diverse, divided and hierarchical teaching force in state schools in Nepal. The first notable division can be observed between the permanent and other groups of teachers. The permanent teachers consider themselves to be government employees. More than job security and ensured pay and perks, their ‘permanent’ tag carries a symbolic meaning in terms of identity and power. In most cases, they feel proud to attach the ‘permanent’ tag to their names and designations, whereas others hesitate to disclose their ‘tagged’ identities. In the first introductory meeting, a permanent teacher (male, 42, upper caste) in school B says about himself:

I am one of the five permanent teachers in the school. Being a permanent teacher, the SMC last year selected me as the assistant head teacher of the school. That is why I am here [showing his office and chair]. Now I have fewer classes to teach. I need to monitor how regularly and effectively the teaching-learning is taking place in the school. (Interview, 13 November 2010)

Attaining permanent appointment means the teacher is a proficient, influential, and secured state employee. Since teachers with this status are selected by the TSC and other groups of teachers have to go through the TSC competition to be elevated to a permanent position, these two categories of teacher (permanent and non-permanent) tend to lie on different rungs of the career ladder. Among the non-permanent groups too, clear lines of division can be observed. Temporary teachers are already in approved government positions and since the Teachers’ Union, an umbrella body of teachers, has been lobbying for their easy promotion, they are just one step away
from getting upgraded. One temporary teacher (female, 42, lower caste) in school C says:

I am in a government quota, but still not permanent. I have served in this position for more than 10 years and I am already 40. I am just waiting to become permanent. This is my right. (Interview, 20 September 2010)

Other categories of teacher (Rahat, PCF and local) are on the bottom rungs of the career ladder. Among them, Rahat teachers feel relatively secure and better-paid than the PCF and local teachers, since the Rahat group is appointed on fixed-term government funding. Rahat teachers are also hopeful of being given regular teaching positions. One Rahat teacher (male, 32, middle caste) in school A says:

We have no problem until 2015 since the donors are committed to pay us. Beyond then, I hope, the government will convert all Rahat quotas into permanent positions. If the government terminates the job of 20,000 Rahat teachers, I don’t know who will come to teach millions of students in state schools. (Interview, 21 October 2010)

This remark signals that there is a general feeling among teachers that the provision of Rahat funding is a temporary arrangement to follow the financial guidelines of the ongoing reform programme, the School Sector Reform Programme (SSRP). Almost all teachers interviewed had an unequivocal opinion that ‘the government is bound by agreement with donors’ in relation to the SSRP funding and as SSRP is a time-bound (2009–2015) project, Rahat teachers have high hopes that the government will convert all Rahat quotas into regular teaching positions subsequent to the completion of SSRP in 2015.

The next appointment category is PCF, which is rather new with just three years in practice. Thus, it is too early to look at the effects of this approach. As evidenced by the contract letter between PCF teachers and schools, such posts are available as long as the school retains its existing number of students. This is the reason why PCF appointments hold little attraction for teachers and would-be teachers. The final category of teacher, local teachers, is selected and appointed by the SMC on locally generated resources, and is on the lowest rung of the career ladder. Since communities raise resources for education by organising focused activities such as launching religious ceremonies, imposing a levy on each household and organising fêtes or cultural shows (Bray 1996), these sporadic activities are unlikely to generate the recurrent budget required for the salaries of local teachers. As a result, their salaries are quite a bit lower than those of regular teachers and there is considerable uncertainty about the regularity of their monthly payments.

The hierarchical provision of teachers has some undesirable effects on their professionalism and unity. It is evident from observation that the permanent and non-permanent teachers (temporary, Rahat, PCF and local) form their own groups for working and amity. In school B, for example, there are two separate offices for the permanent and non-permanent teachers and the two groups rarely meet and exchange their views. The permanent teachers hold major positions in decision-making forums. For instance, teachers in this category hold the posts of school head, co-head, SMC and union representatives, and parent and teacher association (PTA) members. Although government regulations do not bar non-permanent teachers from being appointed to these posts, this kind of differential system is deeply
enthrenched in school practices and has become a kind of unwritten law in schools. The government also prefers permanent teachers to be appointed to senior posts such as resource persons (heads of the resource centres, a local unit for overseeing a few satellite schools), superintendents of the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination and members of the District Education Committee. Very few senior temporary teachers get appointed as the school co-head and sub-superintendent of the SLC examination, and none of the Rahat, PCF and local teachers enjoys this opportunity, regardless of their experience, qualifications and competence.

A clear outcome of such differential approaches is reflected in the two-way accountability system in each school – upward and downward. In general, the administrative approach to teacher management that largely applies to permanent teachers encourages them to show their accountability to the government bodies at the district level. As their services are tied with irrevocable ‘permanent’ status ensured by legislation and the approach to upward accountability helps them establish close relationships with government officials, they tend to feel particularly powerful, secure and well-off. In contrast, the grassroots approach to teacher management that creates four non-permanent categories of teacher makes them accountable to the SMC and school community. These teachers show greater commitment to school duties, but because of a lack of any recognised career path their turnover is very high. This controversy seems to create a ‘them’ and ‘us’ and ‘powerful’ and ‘powerless’ relationship between the two categories of teacher.

**Favouritism and corruption**

The grassroots approach to teacher management that devolves the authority to hire and fire teachers to local levels aims to empower parents and community representatives to make school decisions and enhance the accountability and effectiveness of teachers. While there is little evidence of tangible progress towards such aims, the decentralisation policy in Nepal has brought about several undesirable outcomes, including favouritism and corruption at the local level. The decentralisation reform underpinning the grassroots approach has handed over teacher selection authority to SMCs. According to the existing legal provision, the SMC constitutes a three-member committee for teacher selection. The evidence shows that there has been a tendency to manipulate such legal provisions, however. One such manipulation is noticeable in the SMC formation process in the best interest of local power holders. The Education Act clearly articulates that the SMC chair and the majority of its members are to be selected from the list of existing ‘parents’ or ‘guardians’ in the school. The policy is ambiguous in defining who would be recognised as a ‘guardian’ of a student, however. In practice, political parties arbitrarily register the name of their cadres as guardians of selected students and divide the SMC posts among this group. This is evident in each case study school, where all SMC chairs and most of the members are selected from the ‘guardian’ category, violating the basic policy aim of parental participation in school management. Several reasons may account for political parties taking control of SMCs, but it stands to reason that they wish to keep political control over school governance and make major school decisions, including teacher selection, as they wish. In a conversation with a teacher (male, 44, upper caste) in school B about the recent advertisement of a teaching post, he reveals:
The advertisement to the teaching post and formation of the teacher selection committee is just a show-tooth of an elephant, only to hoodwink the general public. Who will be selected is already decided in a dark room. The selection committee works with the interest of the SMC, the committee in fact is false. (Interview, 10 November 2010)

SMCs in many schools are also accused of corruption. In the schools, where a few local elites hold major posts in the SMC, a high risk of corruption may be involved in the teacher selection process. A teacher (male, 49, middle caste) in school C reveals:

If the head teacher and the SMC chair desire, none of us know how the selection process takes place. We have never witnessed any meritorious candidates getting selected; you can guess what happens inside. (Interview, 22 September 2010)

The popular national daily newspapers in Nepal are rife with stories of corruption and misuse of power in teacher selection processes. The author flipped through two popular national dailies, Kantipur and Nagarik, between 25 December 2010 and 10 January 2011 and found three stories worth sharing. One story revealed that the SMC in Janata Secondary School (name changed) Biratnagar, appointed a maths teacher in a post advertised for a science teacher. The agitated students and parents padlocked the school office accusing the SMC of accepting bribes from the new recruit (Nagarik 2010, 8). Another story reported that four community schools in Morang district in the Eastern Development Region, were in chaos for more than a week due to complaints of parents over teacher’s selection (Kantipur 2011a, 13). Another news item in the same issue with the title ‘irregularity in teacher recruitment’ featured a similar story, but the case was about a school in the Far-western Region. The members of the selection committee in this school were locked inside the school office for an hour as they had reportedly published the names of incompetent candidates for three teaching posts. The local parents accused them of taking bribes from the successful candidates (Kantipur 2011b, 9).

These anecdotes are just a few random cases. A comprehensive and in-depth survey may reveal even more frustrating stories. The problem of corruption and favouritism is not only the case in Nepal, however. De Grauwe et al. (2005) carried out a detailed study in four countries in West Africa and share similar experiences of the selection of relatives and friends as teachers by principals and PTA chairs in state schools. Chikoko’s (2009) Zimbabwe study clearly articulates why the devolved authority for hiring teachers at the school level was reverted to the district offices. According to this study, staff selection committees at the local level were accused of corruption and were employing their own relatives in schools. In relation to reasons to withdraw the government decision to hand over teacher hiring responsibility to the school level in Zimbabwe, a District Education Officer was quoted as saying:

First, the capacity of school committees to recruit teachers in a competent and transparent manner, particularly in rural areas, was very suspect. Second, there were many reports of corruption on the part of school heads and their SDCs [School Development Committees]. They lacked the necessary professionalism that goes with this task. And third, because of poor communication, again particularly in rural areas, the method had become unduly expensive to the prospective teachers who had to travel from school to school. We had to protect the image of the Ministry. (Chikoko 2009, 205)
The commonality of evidence of misusing local authority in countries in both South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa is not a coincidence, but a common problem of devolving teacher management to the local level. It can be inferred from these experiences that a grassroots approach to teacher management is unlikely to yield desirable results in communities where institutional and local capacity is poor, authority is centred around a few local elites and democracy is poorly sustained.

**Equity issues**

It has been evident that the administrative model of teacher management establishes a strong government system to regulate teacher management services and ensures uniformity of services, rights and facilities of permanent teachers. In contrast, the grassroots model of teacher management provides autonomy to school committees to decide teachers’ pay and other facilities, but creates diversity and hierarchy among teachers in terms of their identity, status and facilities. The provision of this differential system raises an equity-related problem in Nepal. Various teachers in the case schools raise the issue of salary variations. What is expected on their part is that teachers with similar qualifications and experience would have a comparable salary structure. But in practice, as the author witnessed in the sample schools, teachers with the same qualifications, but appointed in the permanent and local categories receive vastly different salaries. One local teacher (female, 36, middle caste) in school C shares her grief:

“We [teachers] work in the same school, but get different treatments. I perform the similar job that permanent teachers do, but receive less than 30% of the salary they receive, let alone the facility of pension and gratuity. (Interview, 22 September 2010)

Additionally, the grassroots approach to teacher management tends to exacerbate regional inequities in terms of the quality of teachers. In particular, schools in rural communities, which generally have a smaller number of students, receive fewer teaching positions from the government. These schools rely largely on local teachers who are paid comparatively little due to the budget restrictions on schools. In contrast, schools in affluent communities are likely to generate local resources and pay higher salaries to local teachers with additional allowances. The author surveyed a range of payments that permanent and local teachers receive at the primary level⁶ in the case schools and revealed a similar result. The school in the urban

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Nature of school community</th>
<th>Range of permanent teachers’ salaries</th>
<th>Range of local teachers’ salaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Urban (affluent community)</td>
<td>US$ 140 – 160</td>
<td>US$ 70 – 98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Semi-urban (middle-income)</td>
<td>US$ 144 – 186</td>
<td>US$ 67 – 84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

community A provides much higher salaries for local teachers than the school in poor community C (Table 3). The difference between the highest and lowest salaries in school A is US$90 while this is much higher (US$121) in school C.

It is reasonable to assume that the relatively higher salary structure in better-off schools attracts more qualified and experienced teachers. Equally likely is the movement of teachers from poor to affluent schools. Indeed, remote and underprivileged regions are always a less-preferred working environment for teachers. Teachers working in such communities demand a remote area allowance. One locally appointed teacher (male, 37, middle caste) in school C says:

I am seeking for a transfer to the district head quarters. Unless the government provides remote allowance for us, there is no point to work in such a distant school. (Interview, 23 September 2010)

This voice indicates that the lack of equitable policy causes shortages of qualified teachers in rural schools, as is the case in many other developing countries (Educational International 2007; Bennell and Akyeampong 2007). As the variation in salary structures and other facilities across schools is due to the lack of government control over these issues, a crucial policy issue emerges from this discussion: that is, whether the grassroots approach to teacher management is ineffective in narrowing the gap in quality between better-off and remote schools.

Conclusion

The policy of decentralised teacher management in Nepal appears to be problematic and contentious. The problem arises mainly from the ambiguous policy structure, embracing both the administrative and grassroots models of teacher management and maintaining both the centralised and decentralised approaches to teacher selection, promotion and financing. Notably, the policy to hand over the responsibility of hiring teachers to SMCs contradicts the existing legal responsibility of the TSC for the selection and promotion of teachers. What appears to be a further contradiction is that the government allocates teacher positions to schools, allows schools to recruit teachers in a fixed-term basis and finally makes national advertisements through the TSC for permanent appointments to these positions. A recent news item (Kathmandu Post 2011) states that the TSC is now all set to prepare for advertising 12,000 teaching posts, which are already occupied by temporary teachers. The Teachers’ Union and the newly formed Temporary Teachers’ Union are against the TSC plan, arguing that such open competition does not guarantee the success of all temporary teachers across the country. If the TSC plan goes through without disruption, a significant number of temporary teachers may lose their jobs without any compensation.

Furthermore, the sustainability of the existing approach to decentralisation is questionable due to lack of support from teachers. Literature suggests that ‘the success of any decentralisation of teacher management depends crucially on the cooperation of the teachers themselves’ (Gaynor 1998, 64). It is a fact that the education policy in Nepal is crafted by a handful of bureaucrats in close consultation with aid donors, and their loan conditions largely determine policy goals and priorities (Khanal 2010a). Notably, from the beginning of the decentralisation reform the Teachers’ Union has been clamouring for an equitable salary structure, job security and revo-
cation of the decision to offload the teacher hiring responsibility to the local level. Until conflicts of interest between the state and teachers are resolved and parties agree on a clear policy framework, the current approach to teacher management is unlikely to bear desirable fruit.

Finally, the evidence discussed here indicates some fundamental preconditions to be met at the local level for successful decentralisation. Experience of good practice shows that capacity building at the local level, transparent and standardised procedures for staff selection and a culture of democratic accountability are some prerequisites for effective teacher management at the school level (Chapman et al. 2002; Mpokosa and Ndaruhtuse 2008). Hanson (2006) suggests that decentralisation does not produce desirable results with just the establishment of the necessary legislative and regulatory framework. But, like other reforms, ‘it is built rather than created’ by changing organisational culture, learning new roles, reversing communication patterns and revising planning procedures (Hanson 2006, 18). It is thus evident that decentralisation of teacher management is problematic particularly in countries where a dual approach (administrative and grassroots) to teacher management has been adopted and where the political, economic, institutional, technical and educational systems need to respond to the specific characteristics and needs of the school and the community as a whole.

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Notes
1. Although Nepal is a small country (147,181 square kilometres), it has tremendous geographical diversity. It rises from less than 100 metres elevation in the southern Terai, to some 90 peaks over 7,000 metres, including the earth’s highest point Mount Everest (8,848 metres). From south-to-north Nepal is divided into three belts Terai, Hill and Mountain that occupy 17%, 68%, and 15% of the country’s area respectively.
2. Nepal’s Census 2001 enumerated 103 caste/ethnic groups, which are largely categorised into three groups, Bahun/Chhetri (upper caste), Janajati and Madhesi (middle caste) and Dalit (lower caste or untouchable).
3. A ruling elite caste of Nepal, who ruled for more than a century (1846–1951).
4. The use of para-teachers is of growing concern among teachers’ unions across South Asia and it is estimated that almost 6% of those employed in the region are para-teachers (Carroue 2010).
5. Nepal is divided into five development regions – Eastern, Central, Western, Mid-western and Far-western, vertically divided from the north to south and spanning from the east to west.
6. In Nepal, school education is divided into primary level (grade 1–5), lower secondary level (6–8), secondary level (9–10) and higher secondary level (11–12). Teachers are appointed separately to these levels with minimum qualifications of secondary, higher secondary, first university degree and second university degree respectively.

References


