

**THE ETHICS OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS:  
ARE THEY UNIFORM OR CONTEXTUAL?**

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**Abstract**

Ethics, in the part of educational administrators, help present a healthy atmosphere in schools. However, ethics of administrators in school settings are hardly prioritized, due to the uniqueness of the leadership position, which contains various contexts and situations. A qualitative study on ethics in school leadership identified that ethical codes that are imposed by the State are hardly compatible with the local context. The ethics of school administrators, therefore, need to be well-defined and well-versed within the school setting, incorporating local culture and contexts. A sensitive and participatory approach generates a feeling of ownership, responsibility, and commitment among all stakeholders.

## INTRODUCTION

There is an unprecedented international interest in the issue of ethics in leadership (e.g., Bellingham, 2003; Greenfield, 2004; Isaacson, 2007; Karakose, 2007; Langlois, 2011; Marshall, 2004; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2003; Starrat, 2011; Vogel, 2012). Ethical conduct has always been a key component for the healthy growth and development of an organization. Ethical behavior is imperative in the field of education because an ethically rich educational system assists in maintaining peace, justice and freedom in the society at large. If the professional orientation of school leaders is based on sound ethics, they will be inclined to offer a higher degree of professionalism, including a stronger commitment to their students, greater cooperation with colleagues, increased engagement with the teaching task, and a demonstration of greater expertise, which swiftly propels schools toward development. A greater degree of professionalism and trust among educators produces schools operating at their best (Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkin, 2006).

It is, therefore, essential for school leaders to create an ethically rich climate in educational institutions. However, school administrators often find themselves in a state of confusion in choosing the right administrative decision, which ultimately invites ethical dilemmas among them (Campbell, 1996; Cranston, Ehrich, & Kimber, 2006). In this context, the role of the state is supposed to be crucial, particularly in developing education acts and codes of conduct for educational administrators aiming to address professional perplexities. Such codes also support administrators in creating a sound ethical school climate. However, in many cases, the ethical standard of head teachers and/or administrators still remains unarticulated in the daily practices of schools (Gilman, 2005). In this article, it is argued that these ethical standards stay be unused in the administrative practices of schools since the uniformity in these standards are largely challenged by the contextual codes of the schools. For contextual purposes, the country of Nepal and Nepalese schools are used to explore the issue of the ethics of school administrators.

## THE CONTEXT

Nepal is a small country with an area of 147 thousand square kilometers and surrounded by two Asian giants, India and China. This country of about 27 million people has traditionally been agricultural in nature, but remittance has become an important source of income for many families (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2012). Unable to utilize available natural and socio-cultural resources, Nepal has been classified as a country with low human development. Politically, present day Nepal is in transition, and thus, the future direction of this country is not yet clear. Despite accepting parliamentary democracy for a short period in 1960, politically, Nepal remained an autocratic state until 1990. In 1990, a mass movement changed Nepal into a country with a constitutional monarchy, consisting of a democratically elected government. However, power struggles resulted in instability, which led to the removal of the monarchy in 2008. A jumbo 601 Constituent Assembly was first elected in 2008, which failed to draft the constitution because the political leaders could not compromise. A second Constitution Assembly was elected in 2013, but the same story is currently being repeated with continuing uncertainty.

In the area of education, the first modern school was established in Nepal about 150 years ago, and an expansion of schools for the masses began during the 1950s. Since then, the country

has been emphasizing an educational opportunity for all children. As a result, nearly 95% of Nepal's primary school aged children are enrolled in school (Department of Education [DOE], 2013). However, poor educational quality is the greatest challenge. Schools in Nepal are basically of two types - community schools, which are supported with public funds, and private schools, which do not receive public support. As per existing policy, public school governance in Nepal consists of a decentralized function that is shared between the school head and School Management Committee (SMC), which is comprised of parents. In practice, school management has mainly been the function of the central government and the district level office. The School Leaving Certificate (SLC), being the final examination of the secondary level (grade 9 and 10) and popularly known as "iron-gate", is conducted throughout the nation by the state. Achievement in SLC is not only important for the students, but is also considered to be a matter of prestige for the school. It is worth mentioning again that head teachers and school administrators are synonyms in the context of public schools of Nepal. In very few schools with a large number of students, there are supporting staffs under the head teacher, and the staffs are treated as junior administrators. However, the head teacher is the senior administrator in each public school.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was carried out by using the humanistic paradigm (Creswell, 2007; Flick, 2006; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In-depth interviews and Focused Group Discussion (FGD) served as the data collection techniques. As part of the study's methodology, I reviewed relevant articles by consulting the university library and websites to explore themes in line with the study's context. Based on the literature review, I explored a gap between the knowledge and practice of ethical leadership in the context of Nepalese schools. The ethical knowledge legitimized in the Education Act of Nepal was assertive and directive in disregarding the socio-cultural dynamism of schools. Its practice, hence, appeared to be cumbersome and, to a greater extent, impractical to school leaders. In the process of the literature review and in an evaluation of professional codes of conduct that were instituted by the government and teachers' professional union, the primary themes were explored to guide the study. The explored themes were agreed practices, codes, contextual ethics, and dialogue-based ethics. Being a qualitative researcher, I was aware that these primary themes served as guidelines and other themes would emerge during the process of data generation. Specific to the study, the theme of "personal thought" emerged in the process of data generation.

In field study, I selected the school leaders as participants, and took an account of their perceptions on the ethical circumstances at their workplaces. I also selected members of the School Management Committee (SMC), including teachers and students, to enrich and support the data obtained for this study. The selection was purposive (Patton, 1990), as the schools of a particular district that lies in the mid-hill region of Nepal were utilized. However, to find the best representative schools of the district, I met with the District Education Officer and the chairperson of the teachers' professional union of the district, and explained the purpose of the study. Then, I asked the officer and chairperson to provide a list of the best representative schools of the district, while considering school locale (urban and rural) and performance of these schools in the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination.

In the field, I continued expanding the number of participants until the data generation revealed no new data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the process of data collection, I conducted

interviews with two principals, eight teachers and two SMC members. Additionally, I held two focus group discussions with ten students so that I could incorporate their views.

In the course of interview and focus group discussions, at first, I explained the purpose of my study to the research participants. I also informed them about how their active participation in the interview or FGD would assist in generating data for the study. I also respected their autonomy in withdrawing their participation any time they felt like doing so. Additionally, I was conscious about the possible personal and professional harms to my study's participants. During the interviews, I asked the participants to share their experiences in relation to my study's themes, which dealt with the ethical practices of their leadership. I frequently probed to generate in-depth narrative (Yin, 2011). I was an empathic listener, yet occasionally, I delved more deeply into particular lines of thought and/or descriptions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). I also asked the participants how they experienced the interview itself. During the process, I had an assistant carefully write what the participants said and how they expressed their views.

After getting back from the study site, I reviewed the interactions with the participants and jotted down some important ideas that I had not captured enough in the interviews. I also had a thorough discussion with my field assistant about the interviews. Then, I summarized the field notes in my own words while writing my reflection. All interview data was recorded in shorthand by the assistant.

In the course of data processing and interpretation, first, I transcribed all the data that I gleaned from my participants. The transcribed data were edited with original record and coded. The coded data were categorized for the purpose of developing themes. The themes obtained included: policy, convention, context, personal thought, and existing codes. The themes obtained were then interpreted with theories (conventional, relational, contractarian, communitarian, and communicative theories), along with my personal reflections, to explore the underlying meaning.

To maintain credibility, I used multiple strategies since a single approach was not sufficient (Creswell, 2003; Neuman, 2006; Cho & Trent, 2006). The first approach was "member checking" (Barbour, 2001), in which I brought back the findings to the two school leaders (my study participants) so that they had an opportunity to critically analyze the findings and comment on them (Creswell, 2007). Secondly, the detailed discussion and "triangulation" (Patton, 1990) of the data from my study participants helped me explore the field reality. In addition, the discussion with my field assistant and insights of the theories helped me find the underlying meaning in the data. Moreover, the thick description of my research participants' experiences in my field notes and in my personal reflections also helped me obtain the meanings that resided within the research context (Denzin, 1989; Ponterotto, 2006).

### ***Policies on Ethics of Educational Administrators in Nepal***

Ethical practices are essential for organizations (Bellingham, 2003; Greenfield, 2004; Langlois, 2011; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2003; Starrat, 2011) in general and for schools in particular. In the context of a school, policy plays an important role in establishing ethical practices. An ethical policy has been developed in Nepal in the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment of the Education Act of Nepal and its Education Regulations. There is a specific provision in relation to the ethics of educational administrators, too. I completed a content analysis of the ethical codes of educational administrators mentioned in the Educational Rules. The results of the analysis are as follows:

Table 1

*Content Analysis of the Head Teachers' Codes of Conduct in Nepal*

S	Provisions about	Number of	Percent
N		provisions	
1	General duties (admission, transfer, record keeping, meeting, reporting, planning, budgeting)	12	37.5
2	Following instruction of higher authority	6	18.8
3	Maintaining learning environment within school	6	18.8
4	Reward and punishment	5	15.6
5	Monitoring and evaluation	2	6.3
6	Maintaining relationship with stakeholders	1	3.1
	Total	32	100

As presented in the above table, ethical codes of the head teachers consist of 32 points. In the content analysis of these 32 points, it has been identified that 12 (37.5%) points are related to general duties. This shows that the educational policy of the country has been intended to involve head teachers in the general administrative duties of admission, transfer, record keeping, meeting, reporting, planning, budgeting, and following the instructions of their higher authority. The above document also indicates that head teachers need to maintain a learning environment in schools. They also need to work for the reward and punishment of the teachers and students. Monitoring is another concern of the head teachers. Further, a point on maintaining warm relationships with stakeholders is included in the policy document.

Although the points above are not presented with equal value, they give a sense that the state has formulated a policy to maintain general administrative duties within schools. This clearly indicates that state authority wants to develop schools as their unit of administration. For them, the head teacher is the agent upon whom the state imposes its authority. Although a point is included for the head teachers, in the policy document of the state, to maintain warm relationship with the stakeholders, the intention of the state's authority is to impose the top-level authority to the bottom-level stakeholders, school community, through school head teachers. After analyzing this policy document, I examined the elements influencing the ethical practices of the head teachers. The following section of the article describes those elements that influence the ethical practices of head teachers, as perceived by the stakeholders of the schools.

***Elements Influencing the Ethical Practices of Head Teachers***

The discussion, interaction and interview with the study participants helped me explore some major components that influenced the ethical practices of the head teachers in the study. The themes that appeared out of the data generated in the study site were: *conventional ideas, policy guidelines, individual thought and the standpoints of the teachers' union*. In the following

section, I have revealed how these themes influenced the ethical practices of head teachers within the school settings.

### ***Conventional Guidelines***

The research participants agreed that the ethical practices at schools were governed by local traditions to some extent. They also claimed that school leadership remained successful if its ethical practices are in line with traditions. Among the participants of this study, an SMC chairperson stated that there are adequate ethical policies of government, but these policies are not functioning well as per the school traditions. Ethical practices of school leaders demand the flavor of local tradition, which is often undermined while policies for schools are formulated at the national level.

In addition, it is very difficult for school leaders to neglect the local traditions in the course of performing the ethical practices that are codified in the policy document of the government. Long practiced cultural and social codes are generally preferred by the people at the local level. It is very difficult for school principals to oppose them. For example, a teacher of a school, where this study was carried out, had married a man from the so-called lower caste. Due to this, she faced exclusion in the community. She firmly asserted that local codes largely influence the ethical practices of school principals. She related the traditional concept of society with her own experience of “untouchability”, which is still prevalent in society. She further added, “It is very difficult to break the tradition. The practice of untouchability has long existed in the society, which is hard to give up at once. I do not believe in untouchability, but it is very hard for me to convince the old in the community.”

She further added to her experience, relating with her own inter-caste marriage to indicate how traditions guide human conduct in society. After her inter-caste marriage, when she went to a city of the western part of Nepal, a person of the then constituent assembly of Nepal and a member of the revolutionary party asked them (the pair) whether they had eloped there. By using the word ‘elope’, as she indicated, the person was trying to humiliate them. She remarked that even the socially renowned and responsible person conceives the local traditions as social conduct. This shows that tradition has an influence over individuals, irrespective of their caste, class, or credentials. However, this dimension is not considered when ethical policies are formed in the Nepalese context.

There is another concern of practicing from our old traditions. It is a human reality that we follow the practices of the old generation. Consequently, a new principal’s ethical practices at a school tend to mirror those of the preceding principal. During FGD (Focus Group Discussion), a head teacher said, “Most new teachers in a school initially work honestly for more than one or two months. Later, they begin to perform in the way the other old teachers do.” This means that the practice and performance of head teachers often is influenced by the long established tradition and culture of the schools. Such practices often seem to be school-specific and, hence, the practices differ from one school to the other depending upon context.

### ***Local and Contextual Issues***

There are several local and contextual issues that directly and indirectly govern the ethical practices of school leaders. Since the head teachers of schools stay in the community, they are bound to follow the conventional codes practiced in the community. As the community

codes are conventionally agreed upon, a head teacher is not in a position to reject those conventions directly. A head teacher of a school had a similar opinion on corporal punishment. He revealed that corporal punishment is against the well-being of children and that he does not want it to be practiced in his school. However, as he opined, he cannot avoid it directly:

It is very hard for us to implement the ethical practices that we learn in the text. For example, we would like to follow the child psychology which says that we need to keep our students happy. We should not punish children since the punishment may develop frustration to the students. However, our community people ask us to punish the students to some extent and we cannot oppose them directly.

The above idea might be a tired expression, derived from the long process of trying to convince the community against corporal punishment. It indicates the difficulty that the head teachers face in trying to make the community understand the consequences of such practices at once, when it is so deeply rooted in society. Similar concerns were expressed even by the teachers of the school. A female teacher of the studied school observes a similar situation in the community where her school is located. She said, “Here, if a student is punished, the parents tolerate the situation, and they do not complain. In some cases, they want us to punish their children to conform them.”

These all are, in fact, contextual issues. Although such punishments are strongly discouraged in the ethical policies, the head teachers are bound to discard the uniform rule. They find it difficult to go against these agreed upon ideas since these are rooted in the context of the community in which the school lies. The head teachers are the role models of the community and so in the matter of ethical concerns, it can be hard for them to go against certain ethical concepts of a community in a certain span of time and, thus, they need to accept local context and norms. Many of the research participants revealed that teachers are given due respect. Nepalese tradition maintains that a teacher is a creator, a preserver, and is, in fact, “a real god” (In the verse of Sanskrit language: *guru brahma guru bishnu, guru devo maheshwara*).

No one really complains if the teachers do not follow the duties in school. In some cases, teachers neglect their job responsibilities but the community people do not consider it a big issue. In an interview, an SMC chairperson said that he knew a head teacher, working in one of the schools of a district of Nepal, involved in the buying and selling of seeds and chemical fertilizers. During the peak season of his business, he hired a person to work in school for him and paid minimum wage to the hired person. He not only remained absent in school, but also committed a mistake by hiring another person to work for him. Such a serious case was also tolerated and overlooked by individuals in the community. This case clearly violates the code of conduct formulated by the state, but nobody from the community considers the case as a serious breach of conduct. This type of offence may be seriously dealt with in other contexts. Therefore, there can be an argument that these codes of conducts are no more than ethical aspects of the community.

### ***Role of Personal Thought in School Ethics***

The values and norms of an individual guide them to be ethical. If teachers behave responsibly, there is no need for an external intervention to create sound ethical practices. An

SMC chairperson in an interview mentioned that “head teachers are the right persons to put the school activities in a track.” However, there are certain circumstances that always play a role in developing unethical practices among them. The SMC chairperson further explained, “Most head teachers often try to surmount the school activities, but finally they feel that they are quite alone to put their ideas ahead. This situation caused them to be frustrated. However, there are some head teachers who work for the change.” The study participants, thus, agreed that some traditions are often difficult to change, but some others need to be changed in the existing situations. This shows that individual thought and determination play vital roles in this context. When one or many persons are dedicated for the change, several areas for change can be opened.

In addition to this, a head teacher is also believed to be a responsible person to manage ethical issues. A female teacher stated that “it is the head teacher who plays a major role to maintaining ethics among students and teachers in school. S/he is the person to implement the school activities.” All the participants of my study affirmed that it is quite normal to give or get advice from the head teachers as s/he is a guardian of the school. Some participants even said that head teachers should complete jobs that are hard for other teachers. Recognizing the role of a head teacher, one female teacher informant held this view:

When a head teacher is ethical, all other teachers often hesitate to practice unethical activities. This causes them to perform their jobs well. In fact, a head teacher should encourage the teachers to do better jobs and should not give any sense of bad impression if we really want a good impression of a school.

However, the working procedure of the head teacher differs from one head teacher to the next. The traits of individuals often influence their way of understanding ethical reality. It is, therefore, essential to examine the ethical practices of head teachers based on their individual context. Some head teachers of schools are tired of managing ethics in school duly. Politics, for example, are considered to be a major impediment to duly performing head teacher responsibilities. Since head teachers are often involved in politics, which support them when performing their jobs as per their individual comfort, they often tend to become accountable to the local politics rather than the school. As one head teacher explained:

Even if one fulfills all the criteria for promotion, it is difficult to get promotion without the blessing of powerful political leaders. If I have to flatter the powerful people to get promotion, why should I work? Flattering is enough. I should neglect my work in school, and visit those powerful people who can promote us.

The above remark of the head teacher was not true of the head teachers of other schools. For them, promotion is caused by individual devotion and performance. This indicates that individual thought and feelings of head teachers also influence the proper functioning of schools.

### ***Guidelines Developed by Teachers' Unions***

The role of professional teachers and other stakeholders is considered to be vital to maintaining due ethics of head teachers in schools (Starrat, 2005). In the Nepalese context, the teachers' union has developed a code of conduct for teachers and head teachers. This national



document has been produced with several rounds of consultation with school stakeholders and state authorities. However, the participants of my study often asserted that the teachers' union has a less constructive role in ethical activities of head teachers in schools. The union has its district line authority. It favors each head teacher and the other teachers of the school, even when they do not perform their jobs in a desirable way.

State authorities cannot punish head teachers, although they intend to do so in line with the policy document. Individuals of the professional union intervene in such situations. One of the head teachers said, "If a head teacher gets salary without performing his/her job well and just with the support from the union, then why s/he would work a good deal in school?" On the other hand, the head teacher is helpless in the present situation. The head teacher could not advise his/her teachers of the school although s/he found wrong-doing of the teachers. This happened because he is working under the dominance of an unseen teachers' union. One of the head teachers said, "Now I cannot do anything. I feel distressed when most of the teachers go out from school by leaving their classes for individual work." In such conditions, he is helpless and he needs to ask his fellow teachers for due assistance. The other teachers, however, do not respond well to the ideas of the head teacher.

There are several factors as to why head teachers are weak in implementing school activities. Politics is the major concern in this connection. However, some teachers believe that professional teachers' unions are responsible for unethical practices. As one teacher opined:

Unions should teach the teachers to be ethical. However, the role of a union is controversial. The officials of union often invite teachers to cooperate in the time of election. To make election campaign successful, they want our teachers to take leave from school to help in their campaign. Head teachers cannot control the teachers who are in union movement since unions are powerful in the present context.

In addition, professional organizations are connected to some political parties and, thus, leaders of these professional organizations are accountable to the leaders of the political parties. Therefore, professional organizations are controlled and used by political parties. In some cases, teachers are unaware of the decisions made by those professional organizations.

All participants of my study revealed that the professional union is formed for the rights and welfares of their own group in which case it cannot be discounted as unnecessary. The ethical practices, however, in which the head teachers involved in the union activities do not perform their duties at schools, cannot be regarded as constructive for schools. One of the students said that the union activities should not affect the teaching and learning activities. She said that teachers should follow the principles of their union. However, they need to keep their demands and follow the duties together. She further explained:

Teacher should not make gherao to the state authority. Teachers are the role models for us and they are also the people to spread the knowledge in our community. When teachers involve in gherao, other people may follow the act for their own demand. The government of Nepal overlooks the demands until it can dominate the situation. The learning activities of the students are affected when the teachers are involved in gherao and agitation. This action disturbs the learning of the students too.

This indicates that school stakeholders are not satisfied with the roles of the teachers' union. For head teachers, it is not constructive in various situations. However, some head teachers get constructive support in order to implement the school's program effectively. For example, authorities of the professional union in a school help to maintain harmonious relationship with teachers. They convey feedback of the teachers to the head teacher and the head teacher formulates planning of his own administration in line with the feedback. Therefore, as indicated in the above explanation, this situation of receiving supports from the union is very much contextual, and differs from one place to another.

### ***Policy Guidelines***

The eighth amendment of Education Regulation lists the rules and responsibilities of a head teacher in provision 94 and these policies are responsible for maintaining the ethics of head teachers in schools. The codes cover several aspects of their duties, from maintaining the academic environment, discipline, administrative tasks, school property, school records, and annual programs to implementing them with the support of SMC. These guidelines, however, are not functioning effectively in the absence of an effective monitoring system. Without a sound monitoring system, the implementation might not duly come into effect. A participant of this study had a similar opinion, as she stated:

Teachers are often called immoral since we have ineffective policy implementation and its monitoring mechanism. The state has prepared the codes of conduct but there is no sector to check whether the implementation of it has been made properly or not. Implementation must be followed by a monitoring mechanism.

While discussing their proper functioning, various ideas were proposed. Some research participants had the opinion that the government is responsible for bringing policy into practice. It needs support from the political parties, which have often illustrated government's critical role. It is difficult for a ruling party to manage policy implementation effectively without the help of the other political parties, within the local context. On the other hand, the ruling party often fails to properly implement state policy. They generally appoint political agents to various positions, often disregarding their lack of ability to effectively implement state policy. These political agents work for the sake of their party's interests. A research participant stated, "If somebody is employed because of the political influence of the leader, then that person is more accountable to the leader than the job itself. The government needs to consider this issue while developing a policy guideline for ethics." This clearly indicates that policy guidelines are not effective in maintaining ethics in schools.

### ***Gap in Policies and Practices***

Now, the question arises as to why policy does not address the need of ethics on the part of the head teacher in schools. During interviews and focus groups, most school stakeholders indicated the ineffective process of formulating policy. In some cases, there is much less chance of stakeholders developing ethical school policy. One of the research participants said:

Head teachers' ethics is more or less related to educational policy of a country. The educational policy of the country is designed by high status individuals. In the course of implementation, it seems like chewing iron-rice for them since it is developed without consultation of the real stakeholders who practice or who are beneficiaries of it.

This indicates that the top-down approach for formulating policy for the purpose of school ethics does not function well. The policies that are developed at the central level have been altered at the local level. An example of this practice was provided by a teacher in this study, who revealed that "to remain in the school from 10 am to 4 pm is a rule developed by the state but now I can come to school only for my particular period." The teacher meant that he, along with some other teachers, engage in the profession in a way that is convenient for them. This indicates that state policy and guidelines are followed in schools differently, and at the local level, state rules and expectations are often not met.

The research participants, therefore, felt the need for policy change to ensure educational development in Nepal. Local people at the school level need to be empowered to duly exercise their authority. In his long service, one head teacher observed that government intervention is responsible for the ineffectiveness of schools in the present context. He stated that government should delegate authority to collect fees from the students who can pay in order to provide sound benefits to teachers. He argued against the concept of the "free education" system of the government. I observed that he was also talking about the contextual issues of fee collection to be incorporated in the policy document. In this connection, some of the research participants stated that the government intervention has also developed confusion among people since policies are not quite clear. People interpret the policies in their own ways. A head teacher stated:

Education up to the secondary level is provided for free to everyone in accordance with the present educational provision of our country. This means that a student can get an education in a school without paying. However, some guardians think that the students need to be provided with everything free. Is it possible?

There are several controversies and confusions in school policy implementation, in relation to the ethical practices of principals. The study participants felt the need to discuss the development of ethical guidelines for head teachers at the local level. There are some practices at the school level that do occur, in the form of school meetings and recorded minutes. However, the decision to have a meeting develops over a few days or weeks and often dissipates. In battling the issue of unethical conduct, a head teacher stated, "Being a head teacher of a school, I believe that it is necessary to develop the code of conduct in each school. [However], as the provision to develop codes at the school level is not mentioned in educational policy, formulation of ethical guidelines can't be developed in schools." Such statements suggest that the provision of developing rules should be decentralized to the local context of schools, in order to increase effectiveness.

### ***Theoretical Underpinning on Policies and Practices***

There is no consensus among scholars for explaining ethical principles (Bhattarai, 2010). The earlier trend of explaining ethics was objectivism, which was challenged by subjectivism.

Objectivism and subjectivism were later combined by some scholars, and “intersubjectivism” was coined. Intersubjectivism contains the foundation of *conventional, relational, contractarian, communitarian, and communicative* theories. The ethics of head teachers in Nepal can be discussed through the lenses of such theories.

*Contractarian* theory focuses on justice and rights (Bowden, 2005). Respect for the freedom and equal moral worth of each individual may be expressed in a slightly different way, by an enumeration of the fundamental political, social, and human rights that are shared by all persons (Jennings, 2003). There can be several ethical issues of rights and justice in a society, which differs from place to place and time to time. Generalizations arising from the state document are hard to establish at the local level.

Conventionalism, which was defended by Thomas Hobbes, claims that moral values are the products of social consensus. The theory takes the position that ethics occur with some degree of frequency in everyday activity among people who believe that moral values stand as socially accepted ideas (Hinman, 1994). Through this lense, the question arises: “Can ethical standards, set from central level authority, function in every setting, under the premise of “social consensus”? Does the meaning generated by social consensus differ from place to place and time to time?

One of the most influential components for understanding moral life is *relationships*. Gilligan’s view of ethics predominately exists from the feministic view, in which the moral life is essentially about caring and relationships (Bhattarai, 2010). This theory links ethics with gender, ethnicity and cultural diversity. This view also differs from place to place and time to time. For example, in Nepalese society, the idea of gender differences and relations, experienced from years before, has evolved, and changed. And these are the areas that are linked with local context; avoiding the diversity from the local context to search for wider generalized meaning is difficult.

The *communitarian* aspect of ethical theory talks about the contextual aspect of society (Robinson & Garratt, 2004). This theory can be linked with the study to observe and assess the extent to which the key stakeholders of the schools consider their rights and freedom in developing a locally significant morale for the head teacher. A school often constitutes students and teachers who differ from one another in terms of gender and ethnicity, along with cultural and economic diversity. Thus, it is imperative for the key stakeholders of schools to understand the nature and type of the school leader’s ethics, in terms of what would be most suitable to the students and teachers of the school (Bhattarai, 2012).

Another influential ethical theory is *communicative*, as proposed by German philosopher Jurgen Habermas. This theory asserts that moral values gain their legitimacy through some kind of social contract that consists of dialogue. Communicative theory asserts that maintaining lively relationship with parents, students, and teachers through dialogue is necessary for developing the moral principles of head teachers in a school setting. Such relationships are maintained through dialogue by generating mutual respect between and among the statekholders. The dialogue may cover a wide range of contextual issues and be helpful in forming ethical principles within the context of an organization (Bhattarai, 2010).

The above discussion clearly indicates that ethical policy is embedded in the local context, and thus a document presented from the top authority or the state fails to sufficiently incorporate local ethical issues. Consequently, it invites confusion and ethical dilemmas to school stakeholders. However, there can be further discussion as to whether experts can be involved in exploring ethical guidelines within particular school settings. Although the way of

interaction differs from place to place and there is the chance that any document that is presented among school stakeholders can dominate interactions, the document can pave a pathway for framing the discussion.

## CONCLUSION

Whatever ethical practices may occur in a school, they are to some extent governed by traditions. Being a member of the community, a head teacher needs to accept conventional practices of school ethics. These agreed upon ideas, therefore, pave the path for ethical practices. In addition, the head teacher is believed to be a key individual for managing school issues ethically. When a head teacher is ethical or tries to be ethical, the teachers of the school would be less inclined to engage in unethical practices. This is a unique phenomenon and thus differs among individuals. On the other hand, professional teacher unions are responsible for managing ethical school practices. The union's role also differs from place to place. Policy guidelines provide an idea about the various ethical issues in the school. It is a road map for the implementation of ethical school practices. The policies that are developed by government have supposedly worked in schools since teachers' codes of conduct are expected to be in accordance. However, the policy document of the state is perceived differently at the local level. In addition, contextual issues always pave the path for making head teachers ethical within the context of local society.

Therefore, existing ethical practices on the part of head teachers is influenced by convention, state policy, contextual understandings, individual thought, and the teachers' union. However, in the context of the ethical practices of head teachers in this study's site, contextual issues, individual thought, and conventional ideas are hardly considered while formulating and implementing national policies for head teacher ethics at schools. In order to address the problem of ethics in the school setting, they focus on the existing policies, defined by the education act of the country, as the remedial means. In an honest and preliminary effort to maintain ethics within the school, an individual must focus on understanding the various elements associated with it, with the available socio-economic and cultural setting of schools. Addressing those factors in the local context obviously would help to maintain ethical practices within school settings. Thus, it is essential to make the school stakeholders at the local level participate in developing ethical policies required for the schools. Presently, there is no such provision. Without such provisions in the policy document of the state, no ethical rules for school administrators would be effective. On the contrary, this would result in several disturbances in school settings. Therefore, educationists need to move from the current way of thinking to find a single model to maintain ethics in all socio-economic settings, but need to choose a paradigm to find a contextual model suitable for each school considering local socio-culture and day-to-day interactions.

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### PREFERRED CITATION

**Bhattarai, P.C. (2015). The ethics of educational administrators: Are they uniform or contextual? *Journal of Ethical Educational Leadership*, 2(4), 1-16. Retrieved from: <http://www.cojeel.org>.**



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