

Whole School Approach for School Improvement: A Study in Nepalese Context

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Today's unprecedented social, economic, and environmental challenges are accelerated by fast-growing technological advancement and globalization, and the urgent call for school improvement is inevitable. The whole school approach (hereafter WSA) is one of the effective approaches for the overall improvement of schools involving all the members of the school community—school leaders, teachers, parents, students, and community people. This thematic paper aims to investigate a deeper level of WSA as a holistic and sustainable approach to school improvement. This study was conducted using document analysis. Accordingly, we reviewed articles and policy documents on the whole school approach downloaded from different databases to explore the deeper layers of WSA and current trends in education. The research emerged with five major themes relating to whole school improvement: philosophical foundation, theoretical premises, facets and guidelines, key insights, and opportunities and challenges. This research implies that policymakers, practitioners, and teacher educators need to focus on the multiple aspects of WSA, including pedagogy, effective leadership, continuous professional development, school-based policy guidelines, creating a positive school culture, monitoring and evaluation by fostering a collaborative environment for all stakeholders for holistic school improvement initiatives.

Keywords: whole school approach, school improvement, current trends, transformational leadership, continuous professional development' community involvement

Introduction

During the uncertain, unpredictable, complex, and constantly changing times of the digital era, the urgent call for school improvement has been inevitable. Despite efforts made for school improvement, the desired outcome has not been achieved so far. Generally, "school improvement" refers to the efforts to make school a better place for learning and enhancing learners' academic achievement (Government of Samoa, 2006). Various educational programs and activities are instrumental in school improvement, including continuous teacher professional development and leadership, developing and managing teaching and learning resources, promoting positive school culture, and improving school-community partnerships. While serving as a teacher and teacher educator for almost a decade, I (the first author) and my colleagues (team of experts) got opportunities to work

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in several schools in different parts of Nepal, including both public and private. We collaborated with stakeholders like school leaders, teachers, parents, students, and the community to establish substantial school changes (Mogren, 2019). Directly or indirectly, we were adopting the whole school approach (WSA) in which “all the members of a school community like teaching and non-teaching staff, students, parents, and community people were involved in building and refining a thriving, and positive school culture where everyone feels a sense of belonging” (Dudu, 2019, p. 2). Serving in two schools, one in Lalitpur and another in Makawanpur districts of Nepal, positive changes occurred regarding teacher professional development, resource development, shifting pedagogical practices from conventional teacher-centered teaching-learning practices to progressive pedagogical practices, such as activity-based learning, project-based learning, integrating ICT, motivating and engaging learners in a variety of meaningful hands-on activities by involving all stakeholders in decision-making, planning, and implementing for school improvement. Comparatively, this strategy helped create a conducive learning environment in schools in Nepal.

As motivation among the stakeholders for creating a positive school climate is possible through clear shared values (Goldberg, 2020), we led several formal and informal meetings and discussions with the stakeholders. We conducted a series of training sessions, workshops, parent seminars, and student counseling programs and developed instructional materials according to schools’ needs. As school improvement is a wisely planned and managed process (Government of Samoa, 2006), keeping the shared vision at the center, we supported stakeholders in identifying their needs, realizing their strengths and weaknesses, setting short-term and long-term goals, and preparing the school improvement strategies. It helped us understand and critically analyze the school context, develop necessary policy guidelines and improve plans, motivate all the stakeholders for change, and create a compelling shared vision for the school. We conducted whole school exhibitions that involved all the teachers, students, and parents twice a year. We invited all stakeholders, community members, and local authorities at the middle and the end of the academic session to showcase the positive outcomes and students’ learning achievements. These experiences also reinforced that the whole school approach can be an approach to school improvement with the collective effort of all the stakeholders, which is essential for creating a positive school culture. This research is guided by the research question, “How does the whole school approach help to holistic and sustainable school improvement?” Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the deeper layer of WSA regarding holistic and sustainable improvement of schools involving all the stakeholders in the school improvement initiatives.

Today’s world has been facing unprecedented social, economic, and environmental challenges accelerated by fast-growing technological advancement and globalization. Consequently, the future has been uncertain, ambiguous, and complex, which seems even more complicated in the days to come. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2018) states that schools need to prepare learners for jobs that have not been created and technologies that have not been invented yet, as well as solve problems that have not been expected yet. To navigate such situations, schools need to widen their learning horizon. A review of recent literature revealed that global trends in education have been influencing the lives of individuals and society as a whole. The growing use of technology has been breaking the mass educational delivery and extending the boundaries of time and space beyond the classroom in academic settings (Smith III & Sandvik, 2015). Millions of digital resources and thousands of online platforms have been developed to store vast learning resources. Computer-based assessment systems can provide immediate feedback on the student’s learning in real learning time (Smith III & Sandvik, 2015). Similarly, the 21st-century economy has been increasingly built around human

capital. Therefore, it is necessary to maximize everyone's potential through individualized learning. Therefore, to meet the 21st-century uncertainty and complexities, today's learners need to be equipped with a broad set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, e.g., collaboration, critical thinking, communication, research and technology, problem-solving, creative thinking, leadership and management, learning to learn and self-regulations, developing social and emotional skills, rather than just knowledge acquisition (OECD, 2018). Therefore, the primary concern of most education institutions today is how effective their education system is in preparing learners and making them competitive in the advanced job market and advanced studies. As there is a close connection between education and economic production, it has grasped the attention of policymakers worldwide (Smith III & Sandvik, 2015). As a result, most competitive educational institutions focus on learners' readiness for the competitive job markets and entering into the best universities in the world for advanced studies.

Review results indicate a growing rate of unemployment and a lack of skilled human resources worldwide. Entrepreneurship is regarded as a significant engine for economic growth and job creation (Lackeus, 2015). As a result, various entrepreneurial activities are found to be incorporated into educational activities to reduce unemployment. Multiple studies show that most successful organizations have strategic partnerships or alliances with other institutions for collaborative advantages that foster benefits as partners learn from each other. It indicates that schools need to expand their learning networks with various local and international agencies so far as possible to create opportunities for faculty development, student support, and innovations to overcome unforeseen hindrances and create a new vision for all concerned partner organizations that can promote the sense of life-long learning among all the stakeholders. As a result, they can take advantage and adjust to the competitive job market, keeping abreast of the new changes. Similarly, teachers' roles have been changed from conventional authoritative to facilitator, coach, guide, mentor, and co-learner, which helps learners understand how to learn, love learning, and uncover and understand the information they find. Therefore, it is necessary to improve schools and shift from conventional teaching-learning practices to digitalized individualized learning to address the current trends in education. Moreover, the formation of learning circles for the continuous professional development of all stakeholders and the promotion of a broad set of knowledge and entrepreneurship skills in learners is necessary to prepare the learners for the 21st-century competitive job market and higher education.

With the aspiration of improving the quality of education and grasping the pace of recent trends in education, the Government of Nepal has made several plans and policies, and the schools have implemented them. However, the studies show that the anticipated result is not so satisfactory. A school improvement plan requires a variety of activities. Several past efforts show that the school improvement program's central aim is distracted while focusing on single or partial aspects of the school (Jamtsho, 2015). Therefore, it is essential to focus on the whole school approach in school improvement projects and involve all stakeholders—school leaders, teachers, parents, students, and community members—for its sustainability. It is because providing a certain level of responsibility to the stakeholders makes them feel valued and respected, which increases the level of motivation in the workplace (Sauer, 2011). Likewise, the success or failure of the school depends on the leadership practice and other stakeholders' involvement in school improvement plans and policies. Bhatti et al. (2019) argue that the relationship between leaders and subordinates, leadership style, and participation of the other stakeholders in decision-making and problem-solving are instrumental. Moreover, practical communication skills and listening to stakeholders' voices are also crucial for the organization's success (Sagnak, 2016). Therefore, the quality of leadership and the relationship among the leaders and other stakeholders significantly matter in successfully implementing any plans and policies for organizational transformation.

As a country's economic development depends on the quality of education and the development of a skilled workforce based on the country's needs, the government should emphasize promoting the country's high-quality education. Realizing this truth, several educational policies and plans were implemented in Nepal, especially after the restoration of democracy in 1990. Since then, Nepal has prioritized education investments as a key means of transforming society (Singh & Allison, 2016). The Government of Nepal (GoN) has regarded education as an engine for change, producing a skilled workforce needed for the holistic progress of the nation by focusing on the systematic advancement of education in all the plans and policies in each five-year plan. Along with Nepal's commitment to the Universal Declaration of *Education for All* in 1990, significant progress has been achieved by implementing educational reforms to address equity, access, and quality of education (British Council, 2020).

Despite all these efforts from the government, several studies also show that students' academic performance is below a satisfactory level (Chapagain, 2021), which depends on the existing teaching-learning practices in the country. The GoN (2010) in *National Framework of Child-Friendly School for Quality Education* (2010) reports that "most of the schools in Nepal are still being run traditionally. The whole school environment is focused on encouraging children to get text by heart" (p. 7). It indicates that teaching-learning practices are still limited to rote learning, memorizing the contents of the textbooks in the name of preparing for exams and scoring higher grades, which do not ensure developing necessary life skills that are also known as soft-skills or 21st-century skills as expected by the curriculum.

Similarly, the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP—2009-2016) has focused on three pillars of access, inclusion, and quality by promoting a child-friendly school environment. However, the reality is different, which can be realized in the government report in SSDP (2016/2017-2022/2023). Despite some exceptions, it reports that most schools still follow traditional methods like teacher-centered, textbook-laden, lecture-based teaching, rote learning, and regurgitation. It further reports that instructional materials provided by the center are only sources for learning, whereas teaching materials made locally available are hardly used in the classroom. As a result, the Nepalese education system is blamed for adopting traditional, teacher-centered, textbook-laden, conventional pedagogies that are ritualistic, preparing for exams rather than life, and producing educated jobless youths. The report further clearly shows that educational policies and plans brought into practice to transform poor quality of education are not adequately materialized.

The current scenario of educational practices and students' learning achievements raises several questions: Is there a problem with the practices of academic policies and plans? Or is there a problem in leadership practices? Or did the concerned authorities fail to participate with other stakeholders? Or did leadership practices fail to build the commitment and capacity of the different school personnels? Or is it due to the school's lack of management and allocation of adequate resources? We believe all these questions need to be answered, and corrective measures need to be taken as soon as possible to ensure academic improvement and better career opportunities for millions of students by promoting high-quality education in Nepal.

Methodology and Research Design

In this thematic paper, we critically reviewed articles, reports, books, and policy documents, focusing on the whole school approach for school improvement and synthesized the central tenets to draw themes. We collected articles by using keywords and phrases such as "whole school approach and its facets and guidelines", "school improvement", "pedagogical practices", "teacher professional development", "facets and guidelines", "guiding

principles”, and “stakeholders’ involvement”. We searched articles and educational reports, including articles, books, policy documents, dissertations, and reports published by authentic and well-acclaimed publishers, universities, and organizations. We also explored books and journal articles from databases such as Scopus, Sage Publications, Routledge, Taylor, and Francis, and other influential journals relating to school improvement. Likewise, dissertations and reports from different universities’ databases and reports from well-acclaimed organizations in education and leadership were also reviewed. We downloaded articles, dissertations, books, and reports, of which only thematically relevant articles and theses were included for thematic review. First, we read through those materials, highlighted important lines and paragraphs, and annotated articles. Then, we conducted the thematic synthesis of the findings. We, as authors, have contributed to different sections of the article. After the article’s conceptualization, the first author was primarily concerned with developing the themes. We have drawn the stories substantiating the themes mainly from the first author’s school improvement interventions. The second author largely contributed to conceptualizing the research agenda, writing the methodology section, reading and rereading the draft, and leading it to its final shape. The third author mainly contributed to reading, giving feedback, and, at times, even writing and editing some of the sections of the article. We have distributed authorship in terms of the contribution level in giving the final shape of the article.

Review of Literature

Philosophical Premises: Progressivism and Constructivism

A critical review of relevant literature emerged with various themes of which philosophical promises of school improvement initiatives remained prominent. Review result showed that the whole school approach is a collaborative endeavor of all the concerned stakeholders to improve the learning environment of a school (Brown et al., 2021), formulating all necessary school-based sound policies, guidelines, and practices (Jamtsho, 2015) to ensure students’ learning that traces its roots on progressivism and constructivism as its philosophical grounds.

Progressivism is a philosophy of education based on pragmatism that focuses on learners’ individualized needs, interests, and strengths (Garte, 2017) to learn through their lived experiences and be actively involved in their learning process. Progressive education refers to the innovative practice of education, also known as educating the whole person, using a learning-by-doing approach, and connecting the classroom contents with real-life situations (Tippett & Lee, 2019). Unlike the traditional education system that considers children as empty vessels to be filled with the contents from the teachers, keeping the learners at the center, progressive education focuses on children’s interests and preparing them as complete humans, addressing their social, emotional, and academic needs and interests, involving them in a variety of meaningful hands-on activities with real-life applications following the democratic principles of learning to meet the pace of rapid change of time.

In progressive education, learning is connected with real-life situations that allow learners to participate in various activities to interact and exchange their ideas and experiences in multiple settings (Dewey, 1938; Gutek, 2014, as cited in Williams, 2017). So, it is necessary to make the classroom more flexible so that learners get freedom, transcending teacher-student hierarchies, givers, and receivers to co-learners for social transformation towards a democratic society. For progressive education, activity-based learning, project-based and problem-based learning as experiential learning can be organized around the investigation, explanation, and resolution of the meaningful problems (Tippett & Lee, 2019, p. 89). As a result, students learn about themselves and the world around them through interaction with others because constructing knowledge and creating something innovative cannot be possible through individual endeavors (Tippett & Lee, 2019). Therefore, WSA is required to keep the

learners at the center of the school's improvement by involving all the stakeholders to promote creativity, social interaction in real-life contexts, democratic values, and life-long learning through individualized instruction.

Constructivism draws a lot from the famous Chinese proverb, "I hear, and I forget. I see, and I remember. I do, and I understand". It means students will be juveniles forever, unable to form constructive opinions about the issues, and make rational decisions about the social problems if they are spoon-fed with knowledge by their teacher. As a result, they forget soon. If they can observe social phenomena, they may remember those moments through their sensory activity of seeing. Constructivists believe in engaging learners in meaningful activities, such as experiencing things and reflecting on those moments, which are the best ways of constructing meaning. So they can discover knowledge about the world. In the constructivist way of learning situation, teachers and students share knowledge and power where the role of the teacher changes from authoritative to a guide, coach, mentor, facilitator, or co-learner, giving choices to students' voices in their learning by implementing multiple approaches of representations—audio, video, and texts among others (Tam, 2000). As facilitators, teachers make learners aware of the knowledge construction process rather than being sage on the stage (Har, 2013). They consider individual uniqueness and interests by building learning on their prior knowledge. Therefore, students need to be treated as "expert learners" and co-learners rather than empty vessels waiting to be filled up by the experts (teachers). Therefore, through WSA, all stakeholders can create a constructive learning environment in the school to construct new knowledge. In constructivist way of learning, knowledge is constructed through experience and appreciating multiple perceptions. It is because learners' commitment to learning becomes highest if they have the freedom to set their learning objectives and actively participate in pursuing them within a given framework (Ord, 2012). Therefore, it is necessary to involve all the stakeholders in successfully implementing the constructivist learning approach through WSA, employ various learning strategies, and involve the learners in critical thinking and problem-solving activities by forming small groups (Olusegun, 2015).

However, Paulo Freire (1970) argues that in conventional teaching-learning practices, learners are treated like passive recipients or objects where teachers deposit their expertise in students' minds, which he considers a banking model of education in his seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He criticized conventional teaching-learning practices as suppressing learners' creative potential in the culture of silence—where learners are supposed to keep silent in the classroom, being obedient to their teachers. So, he aimed to reinforce the learners' consciousness of social justice and equality while improving their knowledge through critical pedagogy. Through Freire's critical pedagogy lens, Chalaune (2021) describes the Nepali education system as a consensus, not-critical approach and conservation of pre-established beliefs. Therefore, students lack knowledge and intellectual and social development due to social hegemony, oppression, and inequality in the classroom situation. Freire (1970) further states that the same situation will continue if the oppressed do not get their voices heard. As a result, students never learn to think critically about their problems. So, breaking the culture of silence and ignorance is necessary by liberating them through critical pedagogy.

Despite some sparks, most Nepali schools still follow conventional education practices that give no choice to the learners' voices, regarding learners as passive recipients or objects supposed to memorize the contents their teachers teach them. So, as one of the essential components of critical pedagogy, Freire (1970) recommends using dialogue and problem-based teaching learning strategies and participating learners in real-life situations to empower them to raise questions about their conditions. Consequently, they can be liberated from classroom hegemony, oppression, and inequality. So, the educational practice needs to go beyond just transferring knowledge and develop critical consciousness in the learners that becomes helpful for transforming individuals,

the learning situation, and the society at large (Abraham, 2014). Therefore, to alter the conventional pedagogy in the classroom, all the stakeholders need to be engaged in formulating necessary school-based sound policy guidelines, develop a positive school culture, and encourage all the stakeholders in their professional development to create a socially just, equitable, and democratic society through WSA for the whole school transformation. Moreover, putting the learners at the center, they need to be involved in various hands-on activities implementing the “learning by doing” approach where learners can construct new meaning through conversation, discussion, and collaboration.

However, the reality is entirely reversed as the World Bank (2017) reports that teaching-learning practices in Nepal are too focused on memorization and text regurgitation, which hardly allows space for learners to develop soft skills like critical thinking and analysis. Likewise, the British Council (2020) also states that instead of focusing on fulfilling 21st-century children’s needs, teaching-learning practices in Nepal tend to be too textbook-focused, lecture-based, and exam-oriented. The GoN (2010) itself, in the *National Framework of Child-Friendly Schools for Quality Education*, reports, “Most of the schools in Nepal are still being run traditionally. The whole school environment is focused on encouraging children to get text by heart” (p. 7). It shows that despite some sparks of outstanding practices, the education system in Nepal is still following the “banking model of education”, limiting the learners to memorizing the contents of the textbooks to prepare for exams and score higher grades. Therefore, it is inevitable that schools will transform through WSA to ensure learners learn all required knowledge, skills, and attitudes through formal curriculum and classroom activities supported by sound policy guidelines and practices (Jamtsho, 2015). The learning environment can be improved with the collective endeavor of all stakeholders through democratic participation (Brown et al., 2021). Similarly, learners’ autonomy needs to be promoted, engaging them in various hands-on activities to equip them with all 21st-century knowledge and skills. The teacher’s role needs to be changed from authoritative to a facilitator, mentor, or coach where learners are liberated from all sorts of social and cultural hegemony and treated as expert learners rather than vacant containers waiting to be filled with expert (teachers) knowledge (Tam, 2000). Besides the partnership among school staff, students, and parents, schools need to widen their professional network with other schools, local agencies, and community people for sustainable transformation of the schools.

Theoretical Premises: Transformational Leadership Theory

School leadership lies at the heart of school improvement for enhancing learning and the quality of education. In the current situation, “Globalization has affected all aspects of practical, economic and social life” (Abazeed, 2018, p. 118), a multi-dynamic transformational leadership is required to lead organizations in the uncertain and volatile environment caused by rapid changes in the society (Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). Transformational leadership is a procedure that transforms people so they can dream, learn, and achieve more (Northouse, 2016). It is concerned with sentiments, morals, ethics, standards, and the farsighted vision of the shareholders. So, a transformational school leader goes through the procedure of enabling, inspiring, and transforming the level of the whole school community through a compelling vision, inspiring role models, talking, and intellectually stimulating all stakeholders. He motivates and inspires them to achieve more than their capacity and focuses on their higher needs (Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). They further state that transformational school leader gives personal attention to each staff member by acting as a mentor, coach, and advisor, supplying required support and materials for the subordinates, and providing assignments, a sense of mission, broader viewpoints, respect, and conviction for the whole school community. So, a school leader, as an effective transformational leader,

shapes the school's future with a compelling shared vision involving all the school community members, motivating and inspiring them to achieve desired goals (Day, Sammons, & Gorgen, 2020). Creating a shared vision in collaboration with all stakeholders encourages them to have ownership of the school's mission and vision, and the leader's commitment to "walk the talk" develops mutual trust between the leader and other stakeholders.

Hoffmeister et al. (2014) state, "Transformational leadership consists of four main dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and personal considerations" (p. 69). As an idealized influenced leader, a transformational school leader serves as a role model to the whole school community, admiring, respecting, and trusting them, being ready to take risks, and demonstrating a consistent relationship with subordinates with a high level of decent and ethical behavior (Bass & Riggo, 2006). As a result, the subordinates view their leader as a tireless and determined leader with extraordinary competencies. Under individualized consideration, transformational leaders demonstrate themselves as effective listeners and maintain effective two-way communication and personalized interaction with all teaching and non-teaching staff in the school (Bass & Riggo, 2006). Moreover, he builds harmonious relationships among all stakeholders and creates a professional learning community for the effective professionalism of the leader himself and other staff members. He makes a conducive learning environment in the school (Day et al., 2020), delegates tasks to the subordinates, and monitors them to determine whether assistants need additional direction or support to achieve the targeted goals. Under intellectual stimulation, the leader encourages innovation and creativity by questioning their beliefs and innovatively reframing and approaching those old situations. Moreover, Bass and Riggo (2006) state that a transformational leader exhibits behavior that inspires subordinates by providing a sense and questioning their works under intellectual inspiration. He also develops team spirit, enthusiasm, and optimism in the school staff by involving them and clearly stating desired goals and a compelling shared vision for the future.

Likewise, maintaining transparency and accountability are also essential for a transformational leader who promotes collective responsibility within the whole school community to enhance the quality of education more widely (Day et al., 2020). Involving all the stakeholders in decision-making in every walk of school improvement initiatives, the leader can also rearrange the administrative structure for effective resource management, empowering subordinates and cost-effectiveness, and reinforce school-community partnerships to share expertise and ensure children's welfare in the school for whole school transformation. However, various studies show that except for some outstanding performance in a handful of public schools, the academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Nepal has long been poor, stimulating the growth of institutional schools (Singh & Allison, 2016). As a result, "In Kathmandu Valley alone, the government permanently closed thirty-three community schools in 2011-2012, and District Education Office in Kathmandu has declared that closer of public schools will increase over the next five years" (Ghimire, 2013, as cited in Singh, 2016, p. 4). Similarly, (Singh, 2016) writes, "Public schools to be a mere 'refugee camp' for children from poor families that have created the situation of mass exodus from public to private schools" (p. 8). So, Nepal's failures in school improvement endeavors indicate the lack of effective school leadership.

Despite a handful of successful public schools, the poor quality of education with lower pass rate, dropouts, insufficient teaching learning resources, poor quality of professional development among the teachers, and the closer or merger of the public schools have been severe issues in Nepal (National Planning Commission, 2013). Headteachers are regarded as the key change agents to make the schools successful; they are expected to be multi-

dynamic leaders with a compelling, farsighted shared vision and high standard of moral and ethical conduct, mentor, coach, a role model, walk the talk, inspiring motivation, idealized influence, personal consideration, and inspirational motivation. However, the poor quality of education and lack of professional development opportunities indicate that transformational leadership has not been adequately practiced in Nepal. Even at the policy level, the official duties of head teachers have been narrowly focused on a routinized administrative governance structure (Opitaka et al., 2004, as cited Singh & Allison, 2016). Although there is a provision for community involvement in school improvement activities, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has retained its power in human resource management and development, curriculum development and textbooks, and educational planning and financing. Moreover, the centralized education system in Nepal has also left the headteachers with a lack of autonomy and little space for decision-making. It shows that there are obstacles at the policy level that need to be corrected promptly.

Whole School Approach: Facets and Guidelines

There is no uniformity regarding the facets of the whole school approach (WSA). Based on the Council of Europe (2021), WSA includes teaching and learning, leadership and management, continuous professional development, positive school culture, community involvement, monitoring and evaluation, and policy guidelines as its core dimensions. Teaching and learning comprises all curricular and extracurricular activities to ensure that each learner gets equal opportunities to cultivate knowledge, skills, and a positive attitude through formal teaching and learning practices. Following the democratic principle and human rights, students' learning is ensured by creating opportunities for learners to participate in their learning, for example, through peer assessment, student-centered learning (Gaillard et al., 2020), forming different group works, promoting students-teachers collaboration as co-learners, and giving equal access to the teaching. It ensures that the classroom is a safe space where learners feel comfortable discussing their views openly by creating an open, participative, and respectful classroom environment that allows all the learners to share their experiences, opinions, and emotions (Council of Europe, 2021).

Under leadership and management, school leaders need to demonstrate themselves as visionary role models who can encourage the participation of all stakeholders and respect human rights, democratic principles, equal treatment, and participatory decision-making (Gaillard et al., 2020) to promote community involvement in school improvement activities. As each school community member is considered an essential contributor to a school's overall transformation, the staff's continuous professional development is required through various training and workshops to meet the organizational goals. Moreover, following democratic principles and human rights, school-based policies, values, beliefs, rules, and regulations are formulated per the school's needs to create a safe learning environment. Similarly, it is required to create a nontoxic and welcoming school atmosphere where all the staff have harmonious and cooperative relationships (Gaillard et al., 2020). Everyone feels like they are a significant component of the organization. All stakeholders are encouraged to join hands to create a positive school culture with a more equitable, democratic society regardless of their diversity.

For the sustainable improvement of the organization, partnership with various local agents like social or volunteer organizations, youth clubs, entrepreneurial organizations, corporate houses, media and health professionals, and other higher educational institutions, among others, is encouraged to sustain the school (Gaillard et al., 2020). So, the notion of sustainability should be taken as an ongoing process of finding new and best solutions rather than taking it as a sealed notion of the given solution. Therefore, stakeholders' involvement

is an essential dimension of WSA that strengthens mutual relationships and benefits both parties. Moreover, as preparing and implementing school improvement plans and policies are not enough, regular monitoring and evaluation are also necessary to ensure that all the tasks are completed on time and troubleshoot the problems that arise while implementing action plans.

According to Gaillard et al. (2020), WSA is guided by five guiding principles, e.g., respecting local context, empowering stakeholders to develop solutions to challenges, encouraging participation of all stakeholders, integrating capacity building, and supporting local projects long-term. It indicates that the execution of any new ideas or pedagogical practices and the creation of school-based policy guidelines depend on the school's local context. It is also significant to empower the whole school community, equip them with the required resources, and participate in the collective decision-making process for school improvement following democratic participation to create a safe and supportive learning environment for the school for sustainability (Dudu, 2019). So, a multi-dynamic, visionary, transformational school leader is required who can involve all the concerned stakeholders in decision-making policy formulation and make them take ownership of creating a safe learning environment in the school for its sustainability. Moreover, the Council of Europe (2021) suggests five stages for successfully applying WSA. These stages include carrying out a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges (SWOC) analysis to identify the possible areas of change and developing an action plan, executing the action plan involving stakeholders, evaluating progress and assessing the work's impact, and sharing outcomes with the entire school community for transforming a school as a whole. In addition, stakeholders' participation is necessary to create a positive learning environment for sustainability.

Results and Discussion

The study's findings reveal that today's world has become uncertain and complex due to fast-growing technological advancement and globalization, facing unprecedented social, economic, and environmental challenges. As a result, the future seems to be even more complicated and ambiguous due to millions of digital resources and thousands of online platforms which have changed the global trends of mass-based education delivery to individualized learning to maximize everyone's potential by providing immediate feedback on students' learning in real-time (Smith III & Sandvik, 2015). Therefore, restructuring the traditional education system through whole-school intervention is necessary for learners to face the 21st century's unforeseen complexities and challenges. For that, it is required to equip the learners with a broad set of practical-based knowledge and skills to make them competitive in the advanced job market and advanced studies. Moreover, schools need to incorporate entrepreneurship activities in education (Lackeus, 2015) by expanding their learning networks through collaboration with various local and international agencies like social or volunteer organizations, youth clubs, entrepreneurial organizations, corporate houses, media and health professionals, and other higher educational institutions for the sustainability of the school (Gaillard et al., 2020). Promoting collaborations or partnerships with these agencies can be a cornerstone to create opportunities for faculty development, student support, and innovations to overcome forthcoming challenges and create a new vision for all concerned partner organizations that can promote life-long learning among all stakeholders.

A literature review on the progressive educational philosophy demands learners engage in problem-based and experiential learning, which is designed around the inquiry and solution of meaningful problems (Tippett & Lee, 2019). Similarly, constructivism focuses on the learning-by-doing approach by connecting classroom contents with learners' real-life issues, focusing on equity and social justice, and treating the learners as expert

learners, where they are engaged in meaningful dialogue between teachers and their colleagues. However, several studies indicate that the context of educational practices in Nepal is far behind expectations. Besides some handful of outstanding practices, teaching-learning in Nepal is mainly based on textbook-laden, teacher-centered, rote memorization of the contents and focused on scoring higher grades in the exams that allow little space for developing life skills—communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, leadership and management skills that are essential to survive and thrive in the 21st-century globalization. It indicates the apparent philosophical and pedagogical gaps that can be filled through whole-school improvement.

According to the Council of Europe (2021), the whole school approach includes teaching and learning, leadership and management, continuous professional development, positive school culture, community involvement, monitoring and evaluation, and policy guidelines as its core dimensions. In this context, Jamtsho (2015) argues that the school improvement program's central aim is distracted while focusing on single or partial aspects of the school. Therefore, the findings of the study reveal that focusing on holistic dimensions is necessary to improve schools rather than focusing on only partial elements to ensure that each learner gets equal opportunities to cultivate knowledge, skills, and a positive attitude through formal teaching and learning practices through the combined efforts of all the stakeholders for suitability. It is because providing a certain level of responsibility to the stakeholders makes them feel valued and respected, which increases the level of motivation in the workplace (Sauer, 2011).

A review of the policy documents of Nepal shows that the government has made provisions for the direct involvement of the local community in school management procedures after the decentralization of education in the 1990s. However, “the Ministry of Education (MoE) has retained the authority over human resource management and development of curriculum and textbooks, financing and educational planning, leaving headteacher and School Management Committee (SMC) with little authority over strategically important matters” (Sharma, 2013; UNESCO, n.d., as cited in Singh, 2016, p. 56). It shows that there are apparent theoretical and policy gaps. So, it is necessary to revise the existing educational policy and appoint multi-dynamic, trained professional school leaders to transform schools by giving them more autonomy and decision-making power over a centralized bureaucratic governance structure. The revised policy needs to focus on the role of the headteacher in crafting a long-term vision, building and enhancing collaboration among the whole school community, resource mobilization, team building, instructional planning and supervision, infrastructural development, and setting educational standards rather than limiting them on routinized administrative works by intervening the school.

The review of transformational leadership theory reveals that school leaders need to be inspiring role models with compelling vision (Day et al., 2020) who can walk the talk and intellectually stimulate, motivate, inspire, and empower the subordinates and other stakeholders required to lead the school successfully (Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). They need to give special attention to each staff member by acting as a mentor, coach, advisor, and facilitator and equipping them with all necessary teaching and learning resources. However, the official duties of school leaders in Nepal, especially in government-funded community schools, are narrowly focused on routinized administrative work and resource management with a centralized bureaucratic governance structure with a lack of autonomy in decision-making among public school headteachers (Singh & Allison, 2016) which can be one of the major causes behind the poor quality of education in Nepal. In addition, the headteacher's leadership quality is essential for successfully implementing the whole school approach (Haber, 2020). Leadership plays a vital role in fulfilling the needs and well-being of learners and teachers by providing clear policy guidelines for improving schools. So, WSA demands a strong, effective, and multi-dynamic transformational leader who can

constantly motivate and empower the whole school community. Moreover, constant monitoring and evaluation are required to create a safe and positive learning environment through democratic participation. As a result, a harmonious and cooperative relationship is established among the whole school community that can inspire them for each other's well-being. Moreover, maintaining transparency and accountability are also essential for a transformational leader who promotes collective responsibility within the whole school community to enhance the quality of education more widely (Day et al., 2020). Over a centralized official governance structure, it is necessary to provide more autonomy in decision-making to the school leaders by revising the educational policies on the role of the headteacher as a school leader in creating short-term and long-term visions promoting school community partnership. They need to be focused on team building, developing cooperation among all the stakeholders, mobilizing resources, instructional planning and supervision, institutional development, and setting educational standards for the school instead of limiting them to routinized administrative work. The school leaders need to be responsible for enhancing the quality of instructional activities, curriculum planning, resource development, and proper utilization, as well as empowering teachers and other staff members through professional development throughout their careers. As a result, the whole school is geared towards establishing a conducive learning environment where students get the opportunity to learn to the best of their potential and promote community participation in the holistic improvement of the school (British Council, 2020).

According to Gaillard et al. (2020), the whole school approach is guided by five guiding principles: respecting local context, empowering stakeholders to develop solutions to challenges, encouraging participation of all stakeholders, integrating capacity building, and supporting local projects long-term. It shows that the school improvement process is context-specific. So, it is essential to focus on the local context; it is necessary to respect the social and cultural background of the school, the aspirations of local people, the availability of local resources for the successful execution of any new ideas or pedagogical practices, and formulation of school-based policy guidelines. As stakeholders are the back of the school improvement process, it is necessary to empower the local community by equipping them with the required resources, participating in collaborative decision-making policy formulation, and making them take ownership of the school improvement project (Dudu, 2019) to create a safe and supportive learning environment for sustainability. Likewise, the school improvement process needs to follow five stages of successful implementation of the whole school approach. Accordingly, conducting a SWOC analysis is necessary to identify the possible areas of change, develop an action plan, and execute the action plan by involving stakeholders. Then, the progress of the school improvement process will be evaluated by assessing the work's impact and sharing the school improvement project outcomes with the entire school community.

Conclusion and Implications

In a nutshell, today's world has been facing unprecedented social, economic, and environmental challenges accelerated by fast-growing technological advancement and globalization, urgently calling for school improvement. To navigate such situations, schools need to widen their learning horizon and prepare learners equipped with a broad set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values rather than just knowledge acquisition to face unforeseen challenges and opportunities. School improvement is necessary to make school a better place for enhancing learners' academic achievement through effective leadership, continuous teacher professional development, pedagogical practices, developing and managing teaching learning resources, promoting positive school culture, integrating digital resources, and enhancing stakeholders' involvement. With the aspiration of

improving the quality of education and grasping the pace of recent trends in education, the Government of Nepal implemented several plans and policies. However, the anticipated result is not so satisfactory.

This study makes a significant contribution regarding theoretical and practical implications. Several past efforts show that the school improvement program's central aim is distracted while focusing on single or partial aspects of the school. Therefore, schools need to focus on their overall development through a whole-school approach. The theoretical implications of this study suggest a holistic approach to school improvement initiatives that include its core dimensions of teaching and learning, leadership and management, continuous professional development, positive school culture, community involvement, monitoring and evaluation, and policy guidelines involving the whole school community—leadership, teachers, parents, students, and community people in school improvement initiatives for the sustainable school improvement. Likewise, school leadership lies at the heart of school improvement; a multi-dynamic, farsighted visionary, transformational leadership with idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and personal considerations with compelling vision is required to lead organizations in the uncertain and volatile environment caused by rapid societal changes. The practical implications of this study extend to various stakeholders, offering valuable insights for teachers, teacher educators, policymakers, and practitioners that while implementing WSA, it is necessary to respect the local context, encourage stakeholders' participation, empower stakeholders to solve their existing problems independently, and support local projects for sustainability.

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