

Article History

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PhD Thesis Abstract**Exploring Dimensions of Accountability in Community Schools: A Constructivist Grounded Theory Inquiry**Kul Prasad Khanal* *PhD Thesis, 2019, Kathmandu University School of Education, Lalitpur, Nepal*

In a community school, the school actors perform various activities to produce deliverables as education services. What are their stated or intended responsibilities? How are they performing their responsibilities? To whom are they answerable to; and how are they being answerable for their performance? Such questions give rise to the concept of accountability in delivering services. The notion of accountability has been a contested concept in scholarly debate. Nevertheless, scholars have reached a minimal conceptual consensus that accountability is about an obligation to provide answers to one's behaviors. In this connection, studies have raised contradictory but interrelated issues of particular relevance in education governance. For example, first, community schools lacked resources for intended level of service delivery. Second, the school actors lacked accountability in using available resources. Paradoxically, in the context of having similar resource inputs, some community schools have demonstrated better practices whereas others are even unaware of their resource potentialities. Scholars have also argued that because of the influence of market-based governance practices, a public organization like school is likely to be accountable to those who can pay for the school services rather than the common citizens.

While existing literatures provide ample evidence on contextual understanding of accountability, the paradoxical nature of accountability with respect to local education

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service delivery has not been well articulated in the current accountability discourse. Why is it that the same policy works differently in different contexts? How is the notion of accountability understood and practiced locally? Is it the internal value of the actors or externally imposed mechanism that makes them accountable for their performance? Such questions were yet to be explored. In response, this study aimed at exploring grounded theoretical dimensions of accountability with a focus on “what it means to be accountable for service delivery of school actors in community schools”.

In the light of this overarching question, three subsidiary questions of inquiry were taken into consideration. One, what is school actors' perception of head teacher's accountability for service delivery? Two, how do they build accountability relations with other actors? Three, what are the emerging paradoxes in the process of understanding and building accountability relations? Accountability is a matter of action in process. Therefore, these questions were inquired using the constructivist version of grounded theory methodology. Placing the head teacher at the center of the web of service delivery, two community schools were chosen for the study. In the end, the study developed six grounded theoretical categories of understanding accountability for service delivery. They were discussed in the light of both ancient (eastern) and modern (western) theoretical ingredients.

The study explored that being accountable meant more than being answerable for one's performance. It was a negotiated behavior of the school actors manifested in managing resources, exercising autonomy, empowering actors, seeking integrity, and building a two-way relations between them. Likewise, the head teacher's proactive role ignited the process of building accountability relationships with other school actors which were mediated through the local practices of accountability mechanisms. In this way, the head teacher's agency was creating and recreating the structure of accountability space between the school actors. In the process of understanding and building accountability relationships, the head teacher seemed to be moving in a pendular movement between two paradoxical extremes of being accountable to oneself and being accountable to others. Their movement towards the one far end—being accountable to oneself—would utilize all the situation for improvement transforming them into a benevolent administrator. Conversely, their movement towards the other far end—being accountable to others—was likely to transform the

community school into a semi-private school thereby making them arbitrary administrators.

In view of such insights, the study had two-fold essential implications. Firstly, based on the theoretical categories of accountability explored in this study, an accountability mechanism at the local level could be developed by aligning school actors' individual goal or value with that of the organizational value or mission. In so doing, the school actors are inspired to "being accountable to oneself" by integrating both the local practices and the formal mechanism of accountability in place. Secondly, the findings of the study can become a methodological stepping stone for initiating further inquiries in areas of educational development and governance. Such a study could be designed using either quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods by creating a scale of accountability measures based on the accountability attributes developed in this study

Keywords: education services, school governance, accountability relations, accountability attributes, head teacher's agency