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Teacher management in a decentralised school context in Nepal: an issue of controversy?

This is a well argued and well written account of teachers' experiences of decentralisation of school management in Nepal. The author(s) relate the findings from their study to the wider literature and bring out original insights within the Nepal context, particularly with regard to the 'identity' issues around permanent/temporary teacher contracts. I recommend that the article should be published, subject to the following minor revisions:

1. Given that articles within Compare should have a strong comparative dimension, the authors need to make it clearer within the article what their intended comparative contribution is. Although there is an implicit comparison of the Nepal case with Western models of teacher management (e.g. with regard to Gaynor's classification on p. 8), this could be brought out more explicitly as an aim of the article (e.g. in the introduction). Alternatively, the authors could develop a stronger comparison between the three schools as they represent the different regions of Nepal or between the permanent and temporary teachers or experiences of decentralisation compared across time in Nepal. However, these latter suggestions would suggest a greater reorientation and rewriting of the article.

2. The introduction is somewhat confused as the condensed version of the history (second paragraph on p 2) precedes the more detailed account of educational reforms on p. 3 - 5. The section on p. 2 could be read as decentralisation and community participation being 'recent' policy interventions, rather than coming in cycles through history (as the detailed history explains). I suggest that this paragraph on p. 2 needs to be rewritten, with dates included for when the decentralisation law was enforced so we know just how 'new' or 'recent' the developments described actually are.

3. Regarding the reported 'dearth' of literature on decentralisation of teacher management (p 6), more reference could be made to the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2009 on Why Governance Matters (and background commissioned papers) plus previous published articles in special issues of Compare on this area (Vol. 35/2, 2005, Decentralisation for educational development and Vol. 40/1, 2010, Globalisation, educational governance and decentralisation).

4. Although the authors mention the influence of donor agencies in the conclusion (p 19), I suggest that the historical account also needs to discuss such external influences (particularly with regard to the overall push for decentralisation, e.g. UNDP's agenda) and analyse some of the comments made by teachers with regard to donors (e.g. p 12 'We have no problem until 2015 since the donors are committed to pay us'). This dimension of the power relations influencing the national government's goals and values adds even greater complexity to the notion of 'decentralisation' (as compared, for instance, to decentralisation debates in the UK or US context).

5. The extracts from interviews contribute to developing a strong voice for teachers within the article. However, we needed to have more contextual information – is it a male or female teacher speaking, and – in view of the argument – temporary or permanent? Given the diversity of the schools, it might also be relevant to highlight the area from which the teacher comes (rather than just saying School A etc) and caste/ethnic group? Quotations could be referenced to the fieldnotes – for instance, by giving the date of the interview after each extract.

6. More explanation of certain terms needs to be given for readers not familiar with Nepal or the caste hierarchies. For instance, 'Gurung' (janajati) is not explained at all (p. 3) and the sampling decisions (p 2) could be further explained in terms of representing the three distinct topographical areas of Nepal (Terai, Middle Hills, Mountains).

7. The authors' polarisation of developing and developed countries with regard to problems of corruption (p 15 - 16) is not helpful. I would suggest that the kind of corruption discussed here (e.g. 'nepotism', p. 15 and 'authority centred around a few local elites' p 16) is also to be found in 'developed' countries too, particularly with regard to decentralisation of school management.

8. Table 1: could 'indigenous' approaches to schooling/education be included here too? (or is education run by religious institutions/groups implied by the education for 'a few high caste elites'?)

Typographical/amendments to the text:
- Nepali terms should be indicated in a different font such as italics, eg Janajati
- 'public' schools might be better stated as 'Government' (Nepali terminology) or 'state' (UK) schools
- p 17 'attract' not 'arrack' (typo)
- p. 3 'the final section concludes the article' - This statement does not add anything!

16/3/11