

A Constructivist Case Study Methodology for Researching Leadership Practices in Under-Resourced Low-Fee Private Schools in Nepal

Subash Shrestha* and Rebat Kumar Dhakal

Department of Educational Leadership, Kathmandu University, Nepal

Abstract

Studies on educational leadership have historically relied on models from well-funded environments. However, these models do not adequately represent leadership practices in schools with significant resource challenges. This deficiency is particularly noticeable in low-fee private schools in developing nations, which operate with limited funds, inadequate facilities, staff turnover, and high community demands. Understanding leadership in these environments requires a methodological approach that treats it as a socially constructed and contextually embedded process. This paper responds to the need for approaches that move beyond “one-size-fits-all” assumptions in leadership studies. It argues that exploring leadership in under-resourced schools requires depth, contextual sensitivity, and interpretive engagement with lived realities. Case study methodology is particularly well suited for this purpose, as it addresses “how” and “why” questions and allows for an in-depth exploration of contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts, especially where boundaries between the phenomenon and its setting are not clearly distinguishable. Through a case study approach, leadership

*Correspondence should be addressed to **Mr. Subash Shrestha**, Department of Educational Leadership, Kathmandu University, Nepal

Email: subash_phdedl2023@kusoed.edu.np

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4229-1323>

(Received 05th March 2026; Revised 24th June 2026; Accepted 30th June 2026,
© OUSL)



This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License (CC-BY-SA). This license permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium; provided it is licensed under the same terms and the original work is properly cited.

can be examined as it is practiced, negotiated, and reshaped within everyday school life. This enables a holistic understanding of how leadership interacts with structural constraints rather than being separated from them. The study adopts a constructivist qualitative case study design, drawing primarily on Merriam's methodological framework while engaging critically with Yin and Stake. While Yin emphasises structured design logic and Stake foregrounds interpretive depth, Merriam provides a constructivist orientation that aligns closely with the aims of this research.

Keywords: *leadership practices, low fee private schools, constructive case study, contextualized leadership approach*

Background of the study

Educational leadership scholarship has historically been dominated by theories and models developed in relatively stable and well-resourced institutional environments. Approaches such as transformational leadership, instructional leadership, and distributed leadership have significantly shaped contemporary understandings of effective school leadership (Khadka et al., 2024; Kulophas & Hallinger, 2021). However, these frameworks often assume organizational stability, adequate financial resources, established infrastructure, and predictable working conditions. Such assumptions become problematic when leadership is studied in contexts marked by persistent structural constraints. In these schools, leadership is characterized by complexity and adaptability, significantly influenced by local conditions, rather than being a straightforward or uniform process.

In the first author's journey as an aspiring PhD researcher working in low-fee, under-resourced schools, the author has repeatedly encountered a practical concern that initially felt intuitive but later became theoretically significant: leadership does not follow a "one-size-fits-all" model. Strategies that are often presented as universally effective do not translate consistently across different school types, particularly when comparing elite, government, and low-fee private schools operating under severe resource limitations.

However, the turning point came when the first author's supervisor asked a simple but powerful question: "What methodology are you employing?" This question pushed us (the authors) into a deeper exploration of research methodology, especially case study design in

educational research. Through this process, we interestingly found that a case study approach was best suited to exploring complex phenomena within their natural settings (Nielsen et al., 2013). This understanding was further strengthened as we engaged with methodological literature, which highlighted that case study research is particularly effective for examining real-life, context-dependent educational issues (Collet-Sabé et al., 2022). These claims are further supported by Lauckner et al. (2012), who emphasize that constructivist paradigms assume meanings are socially constructed and that research should focus on how participants interpret and construct their experiences.

Given that leadership practices in under-resourced low-fee private schools are deeply shaped by individual interpretation and contextual realities, a constructivist case study approach emerged as a strong methodological fit. It allows for an in-depth exploration of leadership within its real-life context while also supporting the development of a more grounded understanding of how leadership practices are constructed and enacted in such environments.

Later, after completing the initial draft of the first author's methodology chapter, his supervisor posed another important question: "Why did you choose a constructivist case study approach, and how does it specifically fit your study?" As a novice researcher, the author returned to foundational methodological perspectives and examined the works of Yin (2003, 2018), Merriam (1998, 2009), and Stake (1995, 2005) to identify the most suitable alignment for the study titled *A Constructivist Case Study Methodology for Researching Under-Resourced Low-Fee Private Schools*.

Problem statement

Across many developing countries, low-fee private schools have emerged as important educational providers for communities that lack access to high-quality schooling. These schools often operate under severe constraints, including inadequate infrastructure, financial instability, limited teaching resources, and dependence on timely fee collection. School leaders in such environments must continuously navigate these challenges while sustaining day-to-day institutional functioning.

Most existing studies focus on leadership in stable, well-resourced institutions, offering limited insight into how leadership is interpreted and enacted under conditions of scarcity and uncertainty. Despite their growing importance, research on leadership practices in these settings remains limited. This study therefore emerges from an important gap in literature. Furthermore, there remains insufficient methodological justification for studying leadership as a context-dependent phenomenon in under-resourced schools.

Purpose and research question

The purpose of this study is to critically examine and justify the use of a constructivist case study approach as a viable methodology for investigating leadership practices in under-resourced low-fee private schools, where leadership is shaped by complex, context-specific social interactions and meanings. The study intends to clarify how this methodological stance enables a nuanced understanding of leadership as a socially constructed, negotiated, and situated practice within resource-constrained educational environments.

This study thus addresses the following research question:

- 1) How is the adoption of a constructivist case study approach relevant and justifiable for investigating leadership practices in under-resourced low-fee private schools?

Rationale of the study

Leadership practices in under-resourced schools are deeply influenced by contextual realities and individual interpretations. Since leadership is socially constructed rather than universally applied, a constructivist case study allows researchers to explore leadership within its natural setting and capture the meanings participants assign to their experiences. Among the major case study traditions, approach of Merriam (1998, 2009) is particularly appropriate because it conceptualizes schools as bounded systems and emphasizes holistic, descriptive, and context-specific understanding. This methodology therefore provides a stronger conceptual fit for examining leadership processes in low-fee private schools than approaches primarily concerned with generalization or theory testing.

Research Methodology

This study is situated within a constructivist research paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and that knowledge is developed through individuals' interactions with their social and organizational environments. From this perspective, leadership is understood not as a fixed set of practices but as a context-dependent phenomenon shaped by the experiences, interpretations, and relationships of those involved in the educational process. Consequently, understanding leadership in under-resourced schools requires an approach that acknowledges the complexity of the institutional context and the multiple meanings attributed to leadership by those who experience it.

Guided by this philosophical position, the study adopts a qualitative case study methodology. Qualitative case study is particularly appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena within their real-life settings, enabling an in-depth examination of how and why leadership practices emerge, evolve, and respond to contextual challenges. Rather than seeking statistical generalization, the methodology aims to generate a rich and holistic understanding of leadership as it is enacted within a bounded educational setting.

The methodological framework is informed by the case study traditions of Yin (2003, 2018), Merriam (1998, 2009), and Stake (1995, 2005). Although each scholar conceptualizes case study research differently, their perspectives collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the methodology.

Yin (2003) defines a case as "an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are clearly evident and it relies on multiple sources of evidence" (p. 13). From his perspective, case study research is an empirical inquiry used to investigate "how" and "why" questions, often guided by prior theoretical propositions. His approach is structured and allows the integration of both qualitative and quantitative evidence, reflecting a primarily positivist epistemological stance (Yazan, 2015). Likewise, Merriam (2009) argues that what fundamentally distinguishes a case study from other forms of qualitative inquiry is the nature of its unit of analysis, which must be clearly defined and bounded within a specific system or

context. In her view, the “case” is not an abstract phenomenon but a delimited, observable entity—such as an institution, programme, or group—whose boundaries are explicitly identified so that it can be studied. Work of Merriam (1998) is grounded in the assumption that reality is subjective, multiple, and constructed through individuals’ meanings, understandings, and interpretations of their lived experiences and social interactions. This epistemological stance aligns closely with constructivist paradigms, positioning case study research to uncover how participants make sense of their worlds within particular settings.

Similarly, Stake (1995, 2005) describes a case as a distinct, complex, functioning entity that operates as an integrated system, highlighting the need to attend to both its uniqueness and its layered complexity as it unfolds in real-life settings. Stake (1995) places strong emphasis on using case study research to investigate people and programmes, and argues that cases should be purposefully selected for their potential to maximize what can be learned from them rather than for their representativeness or generalizability. In his view, the value of a case lies in its capacity to illuminate issues, deepen understanding, and provoke reflection, making strategic case selection central to the research design. His approach is strongly interpretivist and constructivist, focusing on understanding lived experience rather than generalization. He distinguishes between intrinsic case studies, where the case itself is the focus of interest, and instrumental case studies, where the case is used to understand broader issues (Yazan, 2015).

When considering a study on leadership practices in under-resourced low-fee private schools, all three perspectives offer valuable insights. However, Merriam’s approach appears most suitable because of its strong alignment with institutional processes and bounded systems. Merriam’s conception of a case as an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a programme, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (Yazan, 2015) fits particularly well with studying schools as institutions and leadership as a process within them. Her emphasis on particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic qualities allows for a rich and grounded understanding of leadership practice as it unfolds in real contexts.

Evidence from the study

This section presents a synthesis and critical interpretation of information drawn from the reviewed research literature. Rather than relying on primary data collected from participants, it examines the ideas, arguments, and findings reported in previous studies to identify recurring themes and patterns. These themes provide the basis for exploring the topic through a reflective and interpretative analysis, while also considering the relationships among existing theories and concepts. In addition, the section incorporates the authors' critical reflections and conceptual interpretations to offer a deeper understanding of the subject and to contribute to ongoing scholarly discussions.

The Case for Case Study: Why This Method Matters

Yin, Merriam, and Stake are well-respected figures in the realm of case study methodology. Their writings provide vital frameworks and structured approaches for both designing and conducting case studies. Each author's unique epistemological perspective—whether explicitly stated or subtly implied—plays a crucial role in shaping their understanding of case study methodology. These philosophical beliefs influence how they interpret the principles underlying their work, as well as the research strategies they suggest for academic exploration.

For example, Yin leans towards a positivist approach, while Merriam and Stake embrace constructivism. Despite the differences in their terminology and perspectives, all three authors converge on a common analytical unit, the 'case' at hand. They all agree that a case study focuses on investigating a contemporary event within its real-world context. Yin describes it as “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context,” while Stake refers to a case as “a specific complex functioning thing,” highlighting its boundaries and operational elements. Merriam adds to this by defining qualitative case studies as “an exploration of the particularity and complexity of a single case (Yazan, 2015).” In summary, while Robert Yin, Sharan Merriam, and Robert Stake may hold differing views on case study methodology, they share foundational agreements about the unit of analysis, definitional boundaries, and the significance of real-world context in their research endeavours.

The unit of analysis stands as the fundamental component in case study research (Merriam, 2009). This element emerges from clearly articulated research questions and can pertain to various subjects, including individuals, organizations, events, or decisions (Priya, 2020). In the context of this study, "leadership practices" within the school serve as the focal point of the unit of analysis. This encompasses examining how leadership functions, how decisions are made, and how strategies are executed in an environment characterised by limited resources and a low-cost fee structure. The case study is designed to be specific and focused, as these elements are essential for understanding the operational dynamics within the school (Tellis, 1997). We find that case study design is well suited to leadership research in schools because it allows leadership practices to be examined in relation to the multiple, interlocking dimensions of school life they shape. Drawing on work of Kulophas & Hallinger (2021), case studies make it possible to trace how leadership influences not only formal structures, but day-to-day operations, teaching-learning processes, and efforts toward system change within a particular school context. In a case study, leadership is not treated as a set of isolated behaviours but as a lived practice embedded in routines, relationships, and organizational cultures. This enables the researcher to follow the "threads" of leadership across decision-making, classroom practices, resource use, and change initiatives, revealing how these elements interact over time. For research on under-resourced low-fee private schools, this holistic lens is critical; it lets one see how leaders navigate constraints, make trade-offs, and enact change under complex conditions.

Alternatively, the analysis may center on one principal or multiple principals from schools that lack sufficient resources. Employing a methodology known as "single case with embedded units" would facilitate an exploration of leadership practices across various under-resourced schools where individual schools or principals act as embedded units. Baxter & Jack (2008) advocate for a clear delineation of the unit of analysis to enable a shift in focus from a single individual or programme to variations among organizations. Consequently, this paper concentrates on actual leadership practices and examines how principals in low-fee private schools implement and perceive these practices. By approaching this inquiry through a leadership framework, we can critically analyze this phenomenon against real-

world contexts along with the distinct challenges and opportunities presented by these environments (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Boundaries delineate the scope of research by clarifying what elements are included and excluded from investigation, thereby providing a defined framework for the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The concept of “under-resourced low-fee private school” serves as a specific bounded case that seeks to explore this phenomenon in its authentic context. It is essential to establish clear parameters regarding time, space, and activities to minimize distractions and maintain focus throughout the research (Yin, 2018). This notion aligns with assertion of Priya (2020) that a case study should have well-defined temporal and operational boundaries. Additionally, Cronin (2014) proposes that these boundaries could be refined further by focusing on geographic regions or specific timeframes to better manage financial and resource challenges. Essentially, this implies that research can be confined to measurable periods and areas of activity within real-life contexts (Payne & Stake, 2021).

For instance, this study concentrates on “leadership practices” and explores how such practices are enacted or perceived across various settings, thus creating thematic boundaries around this specific area of inquiry. The research may also limit itself to exploring leadership practices within a select number of low-fee private schools that are under-resourced, focusing on a distinctive geographical area or type of institution over defined timespans, such as one academic year, during particular policy changes, or at the inception of these schools. By doing so, both the temporal framework in which the study operates and the phenomena being explored serve to precisely outline its scope. This strategic bounding not only renders the research more manageable but also enhances focus on the intricate relationship between leadership and its challenging context, thereby improving internal validity (Yin, 2018). Moreover, having a well-defined boundary system is crucial for conducting case studies; it enables researchers to articulate and comprehend relevant phenomena within a specified context effectively (Nielsen et al., 2013).

A crucial aspect of a case study is situating it within its real-world context (Hartley, 2004). The characteristics of being “under-resourced” and functioning as a “low-fee private school” are not merely factors that facilitate contextual shifts; rather, they are deeply

intertwined with the leadership practices found in schools operating in the most disadvantaged settings. Understanding how these leadership practices manifest requires an examination of the challenges, constraints, and opportunities present in such environments for their leaders. Baxter & Jack (2008) assert that for a phenomenon to be comprehensively understood, it must be analyzed within its broader context where the distinctions between it and the external world become indistinct. If these boundaries blur, further investigation is warranted. For instance, questions such as “How do principals in low-fee private schools enact leadership in under-resourced settings?” or “What does leadership look like for heads of under-resourced low-fee private schools?” must be addressed to gain insight into the dynamics and motivations behind leadership behaviours within their natural contexts. Case studies should specifically target inquiries related to “how” and “why” (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Hartley (2004) also highlights that case studies serve as a fundamental approach for tackling “how” or “why” questions when researchers have minimal control over events. Consequently, the nature of questions regarding how and why certain leadership practices arise and their corresponding impact aligns well with case study methodology. Furthermore, when examining a tangible scenario like a school within this framework, there is typically little to no control over actual leadership occurrences; thus, a case study is appropriate as it emphasizes current leadership practices within an ongoing phenomenon (Tellis, 1997).

In conclusion, this study seeks to understand how leadership is enacted within an under-resourced low-fee private school by examining leadership practices in their natural context. These practices include the principal's leadership actions, administrative strategies, and the contributions of teacher leaders. The study also explores key aspects of leadership, such as strategic planning, resource management, curriculum development, and community engagement. Together, these dimensions provide multiple perspectives for understanding how leadership is practiced within the school.

By examining these interconnected aspects, the study aims to demonstrate how leadership adapts to the challenges associated with operating in an under-resourced low-fee private school (Hartley,

2004). Rather than treating the school as simply another case, the study seeks to develop a rich, contextually grounded understanding of leadership as it is experienced and enacted in everyday practice. However, as Hartley (2004) cautions, researchers must remain focused on the bounded case and ensure that the examination of embedded units does not detract from the primary case under investigation.

Unpacking "How" and "Why": Merriam's Constructivist Case Study – Describing the World as Experienced

This section presents the justification of the research, grounded in Merriam's constructivist perspective, which focuses on understanding the meanings people attach to their lived experiences. In this view, individuals are seen as active meaning-makers who interpret and construct their own understanding of reality in a self-directed manner. Merriam's approach aligns with an interpretive framework that assumes knowledge in educational practice is constructed through human interaction, with meaning-making placed at the centre of inquiry (Yazan, 2015).

This constructivist model assumes the indeterminacy of facts and emphasises the social construction of meaning. It is particularly suitable for examining complex issues such as leadership in resource-constrained settings, where individually lived experiences play a central role in shaping understanding (Lauckner et al., 2012). The approach seeks to understand the world as it is subjectively experienced by participants, focusing on their lived roles and contexts (Yazan, 2015).

This perspective also aligns with Stake's constructivist case study thinking, which emphasizes the importance of multiple perspectives. Stake encourages researchers to explore both shared and divergent interpretations of events, recognizing reality as an assemblage of local and socially constructed knowledge (Lauckner et al., 2012). The term "Constructivist Case Study" itself reflects this epistemological stance, while "Describing the World as Experienced" highlights the emphasis on subjective realities and rich description, consistent with the idea that individuals construct their own meanings (Yazan, 2015).

Stake further distinguishes case studies into three types: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective (Diop & Er-Si, 2020; Hyett et al., 2014).

An intrinsic case study is conducted when the researcher is primarily interested in understanding a specific case for its own sake, without aiming to generalize or build theory. For example, an interest in a particular under-resourced low-fee private school and its leadership challenges may fall under this category, where the focus remains entirely on that specific case.

In contrast, an instrumental case study uses a particular case to gain insight into a broader issue or to refine theoretical understanding (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Hartley, 2004). For instance, examining leadership practices in under-resourced schools can serve as a means to understand wider issues such as resilience or adaptive leadership in constrained contexts. A collective case study, on the other hand, involves the study of multiple instrumental cases to develop a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Gürsimsek, 2012).

The present study, which seeks to explore leadership practices in under-resourced schools, aligns more closely with Merriam's constructivist orientation and Stake's idea of "Describing the World as Experienced." This approach emphasizes subjective reality and rich description, reflecting the way individuals construct meaning from their experiences (Yazan, 2015). In the context of under-resourced schools, leadership cannot be viewed as an isolated concept; rather, it is deeply interconnected with financial realities, community dynamics, and the broader educational environment.

In conclusion, this study does not seek to alter practice but to understand contextual interpretations that are directly relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. Leadership practices in under-resourced low-fee private schools require a case study approach because they are deeply interdependent with their surrounding context. This methodological approach enables a rich, detailed description of the environment, including its settings, interactions, and lived experiences, all of which shape leadership under constrained conditions (Hartley, 2004).

Ensuring Rigour in Case Study Qualitative Exploration

Exploring leadership practices in low-fee private schools operating under severe resource constraints is well suited to a case study approach. This methodology enables an in-depth and context-sensitive examination of complex educational realities. Such studies

typically rely on qualitative methods that capture rich narratives from school leaders working in challenging environments through semi-structured interviews (Chikoko et al., 2015). To deepen this understanding, qualitative case studies often integrate multiple sources of data, including observation and document analysis. Together, these methods provide a more complete picture of leadership experiences and practices (Roache, 2018; Smith, 2018). For instance, face-to-face semi-structured interviews with principals help uncover their leadership strategies and professional challenges in difficult contexts (Chikoko et al., 2015; Dones, 2020). When combined with observation and document review, they allow for a richer and more nuanced understanding of leadership in under-resourced settings.

A key strength of qualitative case study research is its ability to generate deep, contextual understanding through multiple sources of evidence. Since this study aims to understand how leadership is experienced and enacted in under-resourced low-fee private schools, data collection must capture both lived experiences and the institutional environment in which leadership occurs. Guided by Merriam's constructivist orientation, this study adopts a multi-method data collection strategy involving semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. Using multiple methods is essential because leadership is not only expressed through formal decisions but also through informal interactions, daily routines, and responses to challenges. Relying on a single data source would therefore limit the understanding of the phenomenon. By integrating different forms of evidence, the study develops a holistic understanding of leadership as it naturally unfolds within its real-world context.

Semi-structured interviews serve as the primary data collection method because they provide direct access to participants' lived experiences, interpretations, and meanings attached to leadership practice. Within a constructivist paradigm, interviews are not simply tools for collecting information. Instead, they are spaces where participants actively construct meaning and reflect on their experiences. This aligns with the view that understanding leadership requires exploring how individuals interpret their social and organisational realities. The study will involve school principals,

founders, senior administrators, and teacher-leaders engaged in leadership processes. Interviews will explore how they understand leadership roles, make decisions under resource constraints, respond to institutional challenges, and interpret their own leadership experiences. Open-ended questions will allow participants to express their experiences freely, without being restricted by predefined categories. This ensures that leadership understanding emerges from participants' lived realities rather than externally imposed assumptions.

While interviews provide insight into perceptions and meanings, observation and document analysis help capture how leadership is practiced in daily school life. Direct observation enables the researcher to witness leadership in action, including staff meetings, classroom supervision, administrative interactions, conflict resolution, and parent engagement activities. This allows for an understanding of leadership as it naturally unfolds within the school environment. Document analysis complements this by examining institutional records such as school policies, meeting minutes, financial reports, academic plans, attendance records, and development documents. These materials reflect formal leadership decisions and organizational priorities. Together, interviews, observations, and documents create a triangulated dataset that allows comparison between what participants say, what they do, and how institutions formally represent leadership practices.

The study uses thematic analysis as its primary analytical approach because it allows for systematic identification of patterns of meaning within qualitative data while preserving contextual depth. After data collection, interviews will be transcribed and combined with field notes and documents. The researcher will first engage in repeated reading of the data to develop familiarity and immersion. The initial stage involves open coding, where meaningful segments of data are labeled. These codes may reflect leadership behaviours, financial decision-making, coping strategies, resource management practices, or institutional adaptation mechanisms. These codes are then grouped into broader categories and later developed into themes that capture recurring patterns of meaning.

Since qualitative case study research focuses on contextual meaning rather than statistical generalization, ensuring trustworthiness is

essential. This study follows four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility ensures that findings accurately reflect participants' experiences. This will be strengthened through member checking, where participants review interpretations, along with prolonged engagement in the field. Transferability is achieved through thick description of context, participants, and findings, allowing readers to assess applicability to similar settings. Dependability is ensured through a clear audit trail documenting data collection, coding, and theme development, ensuring transparency and consistency. Confirmability addresses researcher bias by ensuring findings are grounded in data rather than personal interpretation. This is supported through reflexivity and systematic documentation of the research process. Together, these strategies ensure methodological rigour and strengthen the trustworthiness of the study.

This study seeks to explore leadership practices in under-resourced low-fee private schools through a deeply contextual and interpretive lens. By combining semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis within a constructivist case study design, it aims to generate a rich understanding of how leadership is enacted under conditions of scarcity.

Through thematic analysis and rigorous trustworthiness strategies, the study ensures both depth and credibility in interpreting leadership practices. Ultimately, this approach provides a nuanced and context-sensitive account of how school leaders navigate complex educational realities in under-resourced environments. Leadership in under-resourced schools cannot be adequately understood without considering the influence of contextual conditions. Chikoko et al. (2015) argue that educational leadership is shaped by the social, cultural, and institutional realities of the local environment. Building on this perspective, Roache (2018) contends that many established leadership models are grounded in assumptions of organizational stability that may not reflect the realities of resource-constrained schools. Dones (2020) further demonstrates that persistent resource scarcity influences leaders' priorities, decision-making, and day-to-day practices. Collectively, these studies suggest that leadership in low-fee private schools is best understood as a context-dependent and

adaptive process rather than the application of universally prescribed leadership practices.

Conclusions

The fact that these stringent methodological elements are applied together contribute to the credibility and trustworthiness of the study findings, allowing the learnings gained from this case study to be valuable as well as generalizable to similar settings. Baxter and Jack (2008) argue that qualitative case studies provide rich contextual understanding, while Mızrak & Culduz (2023) similarly emphasizes the value of context-specific inquiry in comparable educational settings.

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on educational leadership by advancing understanding of leadership practices in under-resourced low-fee private schools. Mızrak & Culduz (2023) argue that leadership practices should be understood within their social, cultural, and economic contexts rather than through universal models of effective leadership. Drawing on these perspectives, the present study offers insights that can inform the design of context-responsive interventions and support systems aimed at strengthening leadership capacity and improving educational outcomes. Such understanding may also guide the development of context-specific professional learning opportunities and more effective resource allocation strategies, thereby enabling school leaders to implement evidence-informed practices that enhance teaching, learning, and overall school effectiveness. Although low-fee private schools have expanded rapidly across many developing countries, evidence regarding their effectiveness and modes of operation remains limited. Ashley et al. (2014) argue that their effectiveness varies considerably across different contexts. Collectively, these studies indicate that, despite the increasing prominence of low-fee private schools, there is insufficient understanding of how they function and the factors that influence their performance.

One area that warrants greater scholarly attention is school leadership. School leaders play a pivotal role in promoting school improvement, enhancing teacher morale, supporting teacher retention, and improving student learning. However, leaders in under-

resourced schools often face significant challenges arising from financial constraints, shortages of qualified personnel, and limited parental engagement, all of which can undermine leadership effectiveness. Examining how school leaders respond to these contextual challenges is therefore essential for identifying leadership practices that contribute to school improvement under conditions of resource scarcity.

The need for such research is reinforced by the continuing expansion of private education as a strategy for improving educational access and quality for disadvantaged learners (Bhatta & Pherali, 2017; Verger et al., 2018). Despite this growth, relatively little is known about how leadership is enacted within under-resourced low-fee private schools. To address this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative case study approach to examine leadership practices in an under-resourced low-fee private school, with the aim of understanding how school leaders navigate complex contextual challenges while sustaining educational improvement.

References

- Ashley, L. D., McLoughlin, C., Aslam, M., Engel, J., Wales, J., Rawal, S., Batley, R., Kingdon, G., Nicolai, S., & Rose, P. (2014). *The role and impact of private schools in developing countries: A rigorous review of the evidence*. Department for International Development.
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a756e0de5274a1baf95e829/private-schools-full-report.pdf>
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 544–559.
<https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2008.1573>
- Bhatta, P., & Pherali, T. (2017). Nepal: Patterns of Privatisation in Education: A case study of low-fee private schools and private chain schools. *Education International Research*.
http://ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10139037/1/EI_Nepal_Patterns_of_privatisation_2017_en.pdf
- Chikoko, V., Naicker, I., & Mthiyane, S. E. (2015). School leadership practices that work in areas of multiple deprivation in South

- Africa. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 43(3), 452. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143215570186>
- Collet-Sabé, J., Garcia-Molsosa, M., Clarke, M., & Haines Lyon, C. (2022). Fiscal cuts in education and their effects: Politicizing learned helplessness as a disciplinary technology in education leaders in Catalonia: An exploratory research study. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 30, Article 159. <https://doi.org/10.14507/EPAA.30.7210>
- Cronin, C. (2014). Using case study research as a rigorous form of inquiry. *Nurse Researcher*, 21(5), 19–27. <https://doi.org/10.7748/nr.21.5.19.e1240>
- Diop, K. A. S., & Er-Si, L. (2020). Categorization of case in case study research method: A new approach. *Knowledge and Performance Management*, 4(1), 1–10. [https://doi.org/10.21511/kpm.04\(1\).2020.01](https://doi.org/10.21511/kpm.04(1).2020.01)
- Dones, F. A., Jr. (2020). Leadership practices and professional needs among secondary school principals: A phenomenological study. *International Journal of Research Publications*, 65(1), 19–28. <https://doi.org/10.47119/IJRP1006511120201553>
- Gürsimsek, R. A. (2012). Multimodal semiotics and collaborative design: A social semiotic approach to the co-production of virtual places and artifacts in second life (Doctoral dissertation, Roskilde University). *Roskilde University Research Portal*. <https://forskning.ruc.dk/en/publications/multimodal-semiotics-and-collaborative-design-a-social-semiotic-a/>
- Hartley, J. (2004). Case study research. *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research* (pp. 323–333). SAGE Publications.
- Hyett, N., Kenny, A., & Dickson-Swift, V. (2014). Methodology or method? A critical review of qualitative case study reports. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being*, 9(1), 23606. <https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v9.23606>

- Khadka, J., Dhakal, R. K., & Joshi, D. R. (2024). Effects of distributed leadership practices on educational environment and achievement in Nepali schools. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 1–19.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2024.2313016>
- Kulophas, D., & Hallinger, P. (2021). Leading when the mouth and heart are in unison: a case study of authentic school leadership in Thailand. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 24(2), 145–156.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2019.1591519>
- Lauckner, H., Paterson, M., & Krupa, T. (2012). Using constructivist case study methodology to understand community development processes: Proposed methodological questions to guide the research process. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(13), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2012.1790>
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.
- Mızrak, F., & Cilduz, M. (2023). Application of analytic hierarchy process (AHP) in evaluating educational leadership theories for effective school management. *Avrasya Sosyal ve Ekonomi Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 10(4), 137–164.
- Nielsen, J. R., Hovmøller, H., Jørgensen, M. T. N., & Tambo, T. (2013). Improving offshoring of low-budget agile software development using the dual-shore approach: An autoethnographic study. In *Proceedings of the 36th Information Systems Research in Scandinavia (IRIS 36)* (pp. 2–17). University of Oslo.
- Payne, A., & Stake, R. E. (2021). Case study approach. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (6th ed.), 443–466.
- Priya, A. (2020). Case study methodology of qualitative research: Key attributes and navigating the conundrums in its application. *Sociological Bulletin*, 70(1), 94–110.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038022920970318>

- Roache, D. (2018). Application of research methodology and methods on principal leadership ability and teachers' performance. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.
<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3297927>
- Smith, P. R. (2018). Collecting sufficient evidence when conducting a case study. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(5), 1043–1048.
<https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.3188>
- Stake, R. E. (1995). The art of case study research. SAGE Publications.
- Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research (3rd ed.)*, 443–466.
- Tellis, W. M. (1997). Application of a case study methodology. *The Qualitative Report*, 3(3), 1–19.
<https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/1997.2015>
- Verger, A., Fontdevila, C., & Zancajo, A. (2018). The privatisation of education: A political economy of global education reform. *Teachers College Press*.
- Yazan, B. (2015). Three approaches to case study methods in education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(2), 134–152.
<https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2102>
- Yin, R. K. (2003). Case study research: Design and methods (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- .