

# Nepali teachers' perceptions of and responses to the impacts of globalisation on their context

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*Since the country's democratization in 1950, the Nepali education system has undergone 12 reform cycles. These reforms have been influenced by international policies emerging from the Millennium Development Goals and the subsequent Sustainable Development Goals. They have instigated an increasing shift toward Westernized pedagogical practices, particularly learner-centred education. Within the substantial research on the Westernization of the Nepali education system and learner-centred education, there is often a lack of the voice of teachers. The research often positions teachers as passive or resistant implementors of top-down reform rather than proactive, interpretative agents of change. A doctoral study reviewing Nepali primary school teachers' implementation of the School Sector Reform Plan (2009 - 2016) found a disjuncture between the teachers' support for the philosophy of learner-centred education inherent in the Plan and their implementation of these practices in their classroom. This paper conveys the voices of teachers as they describe the factors that they perceived influenced their philosophical support for change. Far from being passive or resistant implementors of policy reforms, their discussions highlight careful consideration of their context and the needs of their students.*

*Keywords: Nepal; educational reform; teachers' perceptions; contextual factors*

## INTRODUCTION

Since the country's democratization in 1950, the Nepali education system has undergone 12 reform cycles. International policies, emerging from global agendas, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the subsequent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), have influenced the reforms, with an increasing shift toward Westernized pedagogical practices, particularly learner-centred education (LCE). Studies reviewing Nepali primary school teachers' implementation of the *School Sector Reform Plan (2009-2016)* (SSRP) (Government of Nepal, 2009) found a disjuncture between teachers' support for the philosophy of LCE inherent in the Plan and teacher implementation of the SSRP's practices in their classroom (Government of Nepal, 2012; GFA Consulting Group, 2016). This paper details the outcomes of discussions with Nepali primary school teachers, who describe the factors influencing

their perceptions of educational reform and, therefore, their levels of implementation. The central questions considered in the research were:

What contextual factors did the Nepali teachers indicate as influencing their perception of the *School Sector Reform Plan (2009-2016)*?

Were the Nepali teachers acting as passive or resistant implementors in the reform process or proactive agents of change?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW: THE NEPALI CONTEXT**

The Kingdom of Nepal was established in 1769 through the forcible unification of several smaller kingdoms (Gaige, 2009). Over the following two centuries, various Hindu dynasties ruled the Kingdom. In that time, a caste system was established, creating an inequitable, entrenched, hierarchical social structure (Gaige, 2009). Nepal's population and cultural structure are defined by the diversity of its 125 different castes and ethnic groups, with a total of 123 different languages spoken (Lawoti & Hangen, 2013). The caste system supports deeply-rooted exclusionary practices that disadvantage particular groups and influence every aspect of the structure of Nepalese society, including education, resulting in inequity, marginalization and oppression (von Einsiedel et al., 2012).

The compounding impact of these practices resulted in a civil war (1994–2006). Thirteen thousand Nepalese lost their lives, most of whom were from villages in rural regions of Nepal (von Einsiedel et al., 2012). The peace agreement in 2007 established a UN Security Council Mission for four years to coordinate the international efforts to help Nepal make the transition to peace and development (Bhatta, 2011). Nepalese society became saturated with UN staff, policies, and directives. Concurrently, multiple international non-government organisations (INGO), non-government organisations (NGO) and businesses flooded the nation to assist with the post-war rebuild. In the process of helping with aid and capacity building, these outside influences exposed the citizens of Nepal to alternative ways of being. Nepal's historical and political context provides a unique environment for the examination of Westernization, which is the focus of this research. The rapid rate of exposure, through INGOS, NGOs and business, combined with the global phenomenon of the internet, facilitated an experience of holistic change for teachers.

As already noted, the education system of Nepal, established through democratization in 1950, has undergone multiple reform cycles. The reforms have often been shaped by INGOS and underpinned by financial support for implementation from various governing bodies (Bhatta, 2011). The reforms increasingly focused on a shift to Western ways of education that were seen to be the way forward for Nepal's development and progress towards modernity (Bhatta, 2011). Over time, such a focus has created a pervasive view of the superiority of Western education and an undermining of the validity of local and national forms of learning and education (Eikland, 2018). Several researchers have investigated the impact of Westernization of the Nepali education system. Largely, their research foci pertain to the impact of educational reform on equity and access to education (Carney et al., 2007); the impact of an unstable political arena on teachers' adoption of educational reform (Shrestha, 2011); the cultural dimension of teacher role and its influence on teachers' beliefs about

their role in the classroom (Parajuli & Wagley, 2010); adult education and access to higher education (Robinson-Pant, 2020); decentralization of the curriculum (Edwards, 2011); and limited access to resources and training (Ram Bhatta, 2013). Much of this work positions teachers as passive or resistant to change and focuses on the barriers within the established political, social, and cultural contexts.

The specific reform implementation which this research investigated was the SSRP, which aimed to improve students' access to quality education in line with international definitions of "quality" from the *Education for All* policy (UNESCO, 2014). The most recent reform, the *School Sector Development Plan (2017-2023)* builds directly on the previous plan by reiterating key goals of quality education, although is now based on the SDGs. Changes to the classroom practices of teachers are specifically addressed in the goals of the reforms whereby teachers are expected to: "foster children's all-round development" (Government of Nepal, 2009, p. 6); "promote a child friendly environment in schools" (p. 13) "employ flexible learning approaches to respond to diverse needs and to address learners' individual pace of learning" (p. 13). The language in these goals can be traced directly back to international policies that are underpinned by Western education approaches, particularly the philosophy of LCE in line with characteristics outlined in Schweisfurth (2013).

The LCE based approaches, such as child friendliness and being flexible and responsive to student needs, are significantly different to traditional Nepali teachers' teaching practices, which were described by Eikeland (2007) as "didactic" and by Bista (2011, p. 4) as typically "teacher centred, instructors mostly lecture the subject matter, even in primary level". Evaluations of Nepali teachers' response to the SSRP at the 2012 midpoint of the reform described teachers' implementation of the practices as limited at best (Asian Development Bank, 2012; Department of Education, 2012, 2013). A review of these evaluations highlighted a noticeable absence of their voices or acknowledgement of the rapid process of change that they were experiencing (Eikland, 2018). The reform process was seeking significant change from teachers in terms of their classroom practices; however, it must be acknowledged that change, as a result of the rapid exposure to globalization outlined above, was occurring for the Nepalese on all levels—social, political, economic, cultural and ideological. The gap in the literature that this article reports on is the teachers' perceptions of the impact of these broader contextual factors on them, their students, and their classrooms.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The data discussed in this paper has been drawn from a larger doctoral study that investigated Nepali teachers' beliefs about their experiences of changing pedagogical practices to meet the demands of SSRP educational reform (Ham & Dekkers, 2018). The data was gathered in 2015 and had ethical clearance (project number 14/09-192). The research process was guided by an exploratory mixed method design (Doyle et al., 2016) in which teachers participated in three different types of data collection across three phases of the research. This process enabled triangulation of data from which conclusions were drawn (Carter et al., 2014; Denzin, 2012). The first phase of data collection was a survey (n=327 primary school teachers from 24 schools in Kathmandu valley) that enquired about teachers' beliefs regarding the underpinning philosophies of LCE and the child-friendly practices they were being asked to adopt to meet the reform

goals. The survey results indicated that over 96% of teachers agreed with the ideological underpinnings and child-friendly practices associated with a learner-centered approach inherent in the SSRP reform being introduced into their context. They also acknowledged the differences between their currently accepted authoritarian role in the classroom and the learner-centered role expected in the reform but supported the change required of them to become “learner friendly”. The second phase consisted of observations of teachers’ classroom practice (n=15 teachers from six schools across a range of year levels 1-5, and subjects Maths, Science, Nepali, and English) to identify to what extent they were implementing the specified child friendly, flexible reform practices in their teaching. The findings from the classroom observations were that the teachers were not observed to be utilizing the learner-centred practices in their classrooms: a finding similar to those reported in the Evaluation reports of the reform (Asian Development Bank, 2012; Department of Education, 2012, 2013; GFA Consulting Group, 2016).

The third phase, which is the focus of this paper was based on focus group discussions (n=25 teachers from six schools with a range of ages, years of teaching experience, and genders) where teachers were asked to examine in depth their experiences and observations of the changes in their environments. They were also asked to comment on the contradictory findings from phases one and two of the research, namely the dichotomy between teacher support for the philosophy and practices of LCE and their limited application of these practices in their classrooms. In the focus groups, the teachers explained the systemic and cultural factors that they considered limited their implementation of change in their classrooms, despite their agreement with the notion of learners being at the center of the learning process (Ham & Dekkers, 2019; Ham, 2020). They also outlined factors and their engagement in a process of rationalization that had impacted their beliefs that resulted in their level of agreement in the learner-centred agenda. Data from classroom observations and focus groups were analyzed following Braun and Clark’s (2006) thematic analysis protocol. In short, this included the author transcribing the data and generating initial codes. These codes were then checked across all transcripts to identify emergent themes. After the themes and codes were reviewed again, the themes were named, and a representative quote selected. The findings presented in the next section purposefully incorporate these quotes to ensure teachers’ voices are accurately represented and heard.

## **FINDINGS**

This paper focuses on one of the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the focus group discussions: the contextual factors the teachers perceived influenced them, their students and their classroom and, therefore, impacted their implementation of the reform agenda.

From the discussions, five contextual factors were identified. These are listed and defined in Table 1. Each factor is further discussed with extensive incorporation of the representative quotes from the teachers, developed as the final step in Braun and Clark’s (2006) thematic analysis process. The decision to emphasize the teachers’ voices and minimize the authors’ interpretation was purposefully made to fill the previously mentioned gap in the literature, namely the absence of the Nepali teachers’ voices.

**Table 1: Theme: Influences on teachers**

<b>Changes in Nepali society</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Globalization	Ideas and information that come from outside of Nepal that impact Nepali people's beliefs about the purpose of education
Modernization	The impact that the passing of time has on beliefs and practices
Cultural identity	Change in Nepali cultural identity including loss of traditional culture
Access to information	Access to the internet and social media and the impact on teacher role
Student change	Teachers' observations of change in their students

### **Globalization**

Teachers discussed how globalization and an increased level of information sharing has changed the landscape of Nepali society, Nepali culture, and the education system. Overall, they commented that there had been changes to their social mindsets because of the concepts they called globalization:

Globalization has changed our society. It has changed our thinking process. It has changed our students' behaviour, teachers' behaviour, as well as society. Everything has changed because of globalization. Globalization is very good, though it has some bad demerits also but there is more merits of globalization." (FG 3).

In the main, these changes were viewed as "helpful" and "good" (FG 5).

The teachers suggested that, as a result of viewing education systems on a global scale, they now held a different motivation and perceived outcome for their teaching compared to their previous purpose, which focussed on strict behaviour management to reinforce hierarchical roles and rote learning for success in examinations. They suggest now, though, that "It is our intention to teach them life: how to live with the global context, how to survive, how to struggle, how to prove themselves in global contexts" (FG 2). These words directly relate to the global job market and migration patterns for which they were now preparing their students. This was particularly relevant to the employment landscape their students were facing as many would leave Nepal to find work. The teachers considered that they were now preparing their students for an international employment market: "They will gain a skill wherever they live in the world, they can live by their own skill and compete wherever they live in the world" (FG 2).

The teachers appeared to hold an assumption about the role education played in Western lifestyles, where education was seen as foundational to development:

We can see that clearly the development and the successful progress going on in Western countries is because of education. Education is the main basic support and background of all the development. In every infrastructure and every development, the main supporting sector is education. We have a notion that each and every

people in Western countries are rich and powerful and they do not lack anything and we know that's all because of education.” (FG 5)

Here the teachers were commenting on their perception of the level of access to and the quality of education in the West compared to their educational experiences in Nepal. It was evident that they identified strong links between education and development reflective of similar discussions in international policy such as the SDGs. The teachers discussed how these viewpoints about Western education had impacted their beliefs about the type of education that should be implemented in Nepal.

Conversely, the teachers levelled criticism at the Nepali societies' lack of capacity to critically analyse their holistic adoption of information sourced from international environments. “We get every necessary and unnecessary thing from the West. We have to be selective, but we don't have such capacity. We follow without knowing the result, we believe and follow it without judging it” (FG 3). These comments support the perspective that, although generally complimentary about the impact of outside ideas, the teachers were critically analysing the educational reforms being imposed on them in terms of whether it was a wholesale adoption of Western practice or a positive move towards development.

### **Modernization**

Teachers viewed change as “positive . . . generation after generation, changes should come and bring change” (FG 6) and inevitable. “The time is changed” (FG 4) was frequently used as an explanation as to why the survey results indicated high levels of teacher agreement with the reform goals. They discussed a range of impacts that “time” had wrought. They also described the impact of the modern mindset of seeking economic advantage “the focus has shifted to things like technology and high class and now lots of money; people focus on that now” (FG 5) and the change in religious expectations, “In the old days Nepalese are very very religious and traditional. But now days the children have more freedom. It is different from the parents' days, the elders' days, the traditional days” (FG 6). They observed a change in social expectations of character and morals “Because different morals are there even student character has changed, every social aspect as well has been changed, it has all been changed” (FG 2). Although these comments again indicate an analysis of the changes occurring in their context, the Nepali teachers reported these observations as neither negative or positive but as fact—inevitable.

### **Cultural identity**

On a more sombre note, the teachers recognized that all these global influences and changes, despite their positive future focus, were resulting in a loss of cultural identity for the Nepalese. The teachers expressed concern about the impact of change they observed in Nepali society and culture stating: “It is in a confusion state. I do not completely blame the West, because all we are getting from the West” (FG 3). They predicted that, rather than improving, in the future the identity confusion would only become magnified:

People like to copy others and after that they remain in the middle—not quite Nepalese and not quite Western. Maybe in the future they will have an identity crisis: whether that person is actually Nepalese or another Western people. We

should learn good things from others but not that much that you are losing yourself.  
(FG 5)

They were wrestling with the questions around loss of culture and what their response should be.

How can we ignore the importance of globalization and how can we forget our originality? The explosion of knowledge, the technology, everything we are getting from the West. But only the concern is the culture, people are forgetting their culture. That is a problem. (FG 3)

The teachers did not propose a solution to the loss of culture, but did, as outlined in the following section, hold a positive outlook on changes in students' learning.

In contrast to their concerns about the loss of traditional culture, teachers commented positively on the level of freedom their students now have to think beyond traditional caste structures. The teachers frequently noted that students were now able to consider a range of career options not limited by caste. They perceived that this was due to the increased focus on equity, caste, and gender occurring in Nepali society and law. "Some students, they say, when I finished my studies and I become higher, then I become the minister. They have the vision" (FG 3). They felt a sense of duty to empower their students and give them voice in their society for their future.

It is our duty to make our students more capable of speaking in front of everyone, so when they raise the questions, they have confidence, power to speak in front of others. We believe it is good to get questioned by the students. (FG 2)

The comments appeared to be based on their desire to avoid replication of their experiences as students, which they did not view as positive. "We want them to be more friendly. We want to give them a type of education not what we got in our time that was strict." (FG 6) To this end, the teachers agreed that students are now more likely to become active citizens as they are empowered to interact with each other and the schooling community:

These types of activities make the students perform in the future. They become more courageous. The interaction will happen in the classroom . . . and will help them to perform in front of the mass. It teaches them how to deal with different difficulties and how to deal with different problems. That's the idea of the reform. These changes are making the students easier for the future. (FG 2)

### **Access to technology**

The teachers also commented that the students, themselves, had changed and went on to discuss several negative and positive impacts they had observed about their students' learning. Their observed changes had prompted the teachers to adjust their classroom practice to accommodate the students' needs. In this vein, they discussed an increase in their students' access and use of computer devices. They identified the use of the internet and social media as impacting student learning and the role that they, as teachers, played in the classroom. They highlighted that the use of social media was an increasingly dominant information source, stating that, "Social media also works a lot in their learning process, in at least they have been active and been moving towards that dimension, to the social dimension. The things which they have not learned from school they have learned from the outer society" (FG 1).

In addition, teachers saw access to social media contributing to changes in their students' study habits, "Since technology has been invented, most students have been using it and they are not studying, they are not focussing on their study. They are different, they know things, they see films, games, movies from different environments" (FG 4).

Teachers also noted seeing changes to the level of respect they were given by students. They outlined changes in their role as teachers, noting the shift from being a respected source of information to being ignored as a reliable source of students' information. "They can use IT no? They can ask Facebook only and all, so they don't have to respect us" (FG 1). They also expressed concern about the way students were misusing information where they noted a rise in the incidents of plagiarism in their students' work, "So when I make them write up, they say that they all copy from there (the internet). They don't have their own ideas. They write from the net" (FG 5). This comment again indicated that the teachers were analysing changes in their students and in their role as teachers as a result of contextual factors, particularly the increasing use of ICTs.

Conversely, teachers highlighted positive perceptions about the changes in student learning styles and engagement in their classrooms. They indicated that when they implemented new teaching practices, there had been noticeable changes in their students' learning based on: the interactions students were having with each other—"Most important is the group work. Then the works can be completed very well. Work completion will be very timely and easily" (FG 1); classroom activities, creating a "Lovely atmosphere . . . a favourable atmosphere to learn more" (FG 4); and through creative opportunities, "In our time there was not any creativity. I was not given any creativity. But now the students, we are letting our students to show their creativeness" (FG 2). Though these quotes are mainly in relation to group work and creative approaches, the teachers' discussions of the impact of these different methods of teaching indicated that they were concerned with development of their students' wider skills, such as confidence, collaboration, enjoyment of learning, and creativity rather than just knowledge of the content required for assessment. The comments also indicated that, despite the finding from the observations, some teachers were implementing the new practices.

## **DISCUSSION**

The 2016 evaluation of teachers' responses to the SSRP stated that "although teacher training in content and method were provided under the SSRP, new learning methods have not been transferred to the classroom" (GFA Consulting Group, 2016, p. 3). The report provided no insights into the teachers' perspective of the reform, nor any further explanation of their role in its implementation. By silencing teachers' extensive consideration of their contexts, their understanding of the purpose of education, and their consideration of their students' needs within and beyond Nepal, the teachers were positioned as passive and, potentially, barriers to improving the quality of the education of Nepali children when, in fact, the opposite is true. The discussions with the teachers in the focus groups, as seen in the representative quotes above, suggest that, rather than being passive or resistive implementors, the teachers were clearly analyzing not only the educational changes but the broader societal factors impacting their roles and classroom dynamics. The teachers highlighted their understanding of the connectivity between

global events and actions, changes in the local Nepali society and the global marketplace, and how this impacted their individual beliefs and understanding of themselves as teachers and their students in this context.

The two leading international organizations currently working towards the implementation of quality education, on which the SSPR was based, are UNESCO and the OECD. A comparative analysis of their respective policies, embedded within the 2015 SDGs and 2018 PISA frameworks by Vaccari and Gardinier (2019) found two distinct conceptualizations of the purpose of quality education. Both were seen to “actively envisage a world beyond today” (Vaccari & Gardinier, 2019, p. 80); however, the OECD policy focused on increasing students’ knowledge and skills as they pertain to developing capacity to contribute to the global work force, whereas UNESCO’s policy focused on the central attitudes and values that preference human dignity and a common humanity. Although the data from this research was gathered in 2015, the year the SDGs were released and prior to the introduction of the OECD PISA Global competence framework, the Nepali teachers raise both these imperatives in relation to educating their students for the future.

Their responses showed that they are conscious of the change in their role and how they now need to prepare their students to both compete in a world beyond Nepal and to actively engage in Nepali cultural and societal landscapes. The teachers outlined the necessity to equip their students with the confidence and skills to challenge traditional caste structures and to feel free to pursue a career of their choice. The teachers’ discussions suggested that they are influenced to change their classroom practices as a response to multifaceted changes in society and the world, rather than as a result of the change demanded by the national educational reform. In this sense, the teachers positioned themselves as actively responding to the results of changes within society and in their students rather than simply responding to the requirements of the SSPR educational reform.

This positioning occurred with reference to factors they were observing outside of Nepal, inside Nepal, to the passing of time, and through their own reflexive consideration of the changes they were witnessing. This reflexivity was particularly evident in their observation of changes in their students. They made comparative statements about their experiences in school and how allowing students to be creative in groups facilitated achievement but also created a different atmosphere in their classroom. Rather than being threatened by the fact that the students had access to a wider source of information, the teachers saw both the benefits and challenges of this access and were trying to respond to the shift, always keeping in mind what was best for their students. These careful considerations of their past and present context and their students’ needs indicated that the Nepali teachers were acting with agency rather than being passive implementors.

The literature suggests that the type of reflexive practices described above are what constitutes teachers’ agency within a reform setting. Biesta et al. (2015) explained that teachers’ reflexive evaluation includes: a teacher’s past; their consideration of structural and cultural contextual factors and materials available; and their projected long- and short-term goals of education. In her study of Nepali teacher agency, Eikeland (2018) suggested that each individual in a society can purposefully act and that these actions can impact the structures of the environment of which they are a part (p. 50). Like

Biesta et al. (2015), Eikland highlights how one's past, current and future experiences and perceptions impact one's evaluation of externally proposed change.

In this study, Nepali teachers referred to all these elements of evaluation: past, context, and purpose. Comparing their responses to the research suggests that the teachers were exercising agency in evaluating and shaping their personal and collective responses to the SSRP, and that their actions to implement or not to implement the national educational reform were the result of careful analysis. This perspective repositions their role in the educational reform from simply responding to, resisting, or implementing international education policy agendas through the SSRP reform to that of active, informed agents of change. It also emphasizes the importance of including teachers in guiding the design and process of educational reforms rather than viewing them as non-responsive, as the GFA Consulting Group's evaluation suggested in the Nepali context.

The potential for teachers' agency in an advisory role as part of educational reforms was evident in the work of Spreen et al. (2019). They proposed that policy design and improvement strategies would be impacted positively when teachers are enabled to contribute their on-the-ground knowledge of their contexts. Their study goes one step further by providing evidence that teachers' inclusion in developing teacher standards and professional norms not only improves policy but also acts as teacher professional development, which has a direct impact on teachers' motivation and their capacity to reflect on their practice (Spreen et al., 2019). Like this study, Spreen et al.'s (2019) work values the teachers' reflexive consideration of their experiences in situ, rather than preferencing a top-down implementation of reform.

The findings from this study add to the research that emphasizes the importance of not viewing policy development and directives as a linear process with teachers as passive responders and end users. Instead, it is suggested that the process should be seen as dynamic and cyclical (Spreen et al., 2019) with teachers reflexively considering and conceptualizing change in their context and responding appropriately for what they perceive as the good of their students. In the wider study, not reported in the findings above, the Nepali teachers themselves advocated that they should play a pivotal role in the design and implementation of future reforms, and in any training designed to develop the skills of Nepali teachers.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper sought to explore what contextual factors Nepali teachers perceived influenced their response to the SSRP education reform and whether they were passive implementors or resisters in the reform process, or if they were acting as proactive agents of change. Where discourse on reforms of education policy, curriculum, and pedagogy tends to focus on the impact of such changes *on* teachers, the Nepali teachers' discussions suggest that teachers actually undergo a wider, less structured, but perhaps even more powerful, lived and cyclical process of consideration of the changes and their impacts. This was evident in the teachers' considerations of the cultural and societal shifts in Nepal, how they and their students are living through and influenced by the impact of external factors, and how they responded to these changes in their classrooms. It is argued that the teachers are intuitively responding, not only to the imposed education reform but also to their own understanding and lived experience of globalization by becoming agents for change in their classrooms. They discussed their

ability to read the global landscape and interpret the realities not just *for* their students but *with* their students, as they respond to inherent shifts in their students' increased access to the outside world and their own personal desire to prepare their students for a future vastly different to their own lived experience.

The teachers' perceptions of their role in preparing students for an unknown future in a globalized world focused on fostering the skills and empowerment needed to meet challenges and compete; to stand up for equity; and to have a vision beyond societal expectations of a set role. One of the limitations of the study was that all data was collected from teachers within Kathmandu Valley. Although teachers were sourced from a range of school types, the voices of rural and remote teachers are not reflected in this study. These teachers have traditionally been reported as the most resistant to change but, as with the teachers in this study, we would need to hear their voices before making assumptions about the agentic role they play in their context.

Given that the discussions reported in this study were drawn from data collected from teachers in 2015, it was surprising to see the alignment of the teachers' responses with the language and intent of current UNESCO and OECD policies. This and other lessons learned from listening to the voices of the Nepali teachers about their experiences of a reform process are a reminder that the implementation of large-scale reform is ultimately enacted by teachers, and that teachers respond to the required changes through considerations of the wider cultural and social environment and the perceived needs of their students, often pre-empting global policy agendas. The findings of this study also emphasize the importance of including teachers' voices more directly in a cyclical reform process rather than implementing linear, top-down policy directives.

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