

## LOCAL CURRICULUM IN SCHOOLS IN NEPAL: A GAP BETWEEN POLICIES AND PRACTICES

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### ABSTRACT

*This article aims to explore the policy provisions and practices of the local curriculum in primary level schools. Data are generated from teachers, head teachers, resource persons, and Assistant District Education Officer by using interview and focus group discussion. In addition, document analysis is done to locate the existing implementation status of local curriculum. The study revealed that the provision of local curriculum exists only on policy that lacks implementation in most primary schools. The popular trend of teaching English language is replacing the local curriculum. Teachers and head teachers are not well-informed and not acquainted with the developing guidelines of local curriculum. Similarly, they are perceived as lacking of technical knowledge in designing curricula. Therefore, there is a serious gap between the policy intention and its execution. This has created dilemma in practicing the local curriculum at primary level education in Nepal.*

**KEYWORDS:** Local curriculum, curriculum policy, implementation status, primary schools

### INTRODUCTION

Contextualizing national curriculum by adopting local knowledge is the recent trends in the curriculum development process. The intent of introducing local curriculum is to empower local stakeholders in designing the relevant curriculum. The concept of the local curriculum was materialized after the implementation of Primary Education Curriculum (1992). As such, the idea of educating people on the basis of local needs of the people is not new in Nepal. Reports have shown that the idea of incorporating local need based subjects in school curricula is essential (NNEPC, 1956; ARNEC, 1962; NEC 1992 & HLNEC, 1998). For instance, the National Curriculum Framework has given a serious concern to local need-based education. Moreover, the document has determined “the provision of local need based learning” as guiding principle for curriculum development (NCF, 2005).

In recent years, the centralized curriculum development process has been replaced by school-based curriculum development. The “School Based Curriculum Development” refers to different explanations such as “curriculum decentralization,” “curriculum localization,” “school focused curriculum,” “the local curriculum,” etc. In Nepal, school-based curriculum development is considered as the “local curriculum” and currently its provision is mandatory in teaching learning processes of primary

level schools. However, these concepts also emphasize that individual schools have rights to design their own curricula (CEIR, 2010). Nepali educators have been experienced the centralized curriculum development system for decades. However, making curriculum more relevant to the society of diverse contexts is the major issue around the world (CEIR, 2010). Curriculum development and implementation process appears to be the chief concern to educationists, governments, and parents. Centralized curriculum development process is being criticized as failed to make relevant curriculum as per the needs of the local society (Marsh & Wills, 1999). To address such criticisms, some new initiatives have been carried out as a form of school-based curriculum development. According to Skilbeck (1984), school-based curriculum development is the planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating process of a program of students' learning by the educational institution of which these students are members (as cited in Marsh & Heng, 2008, p. 2). Another reason for applying school-based curriculum development is to produce a curriculum relevant to local context, and to build it on local resources and interest.

National Education Commission (1992) highlighted the importance of incorporating the local need-based learning and recommended it for educational reform (NEC, 1992). For the first time in Nepal, the Primary Education Curriculum (1992) emphasized and incorporated the provision of the local curriculum (CDC, 1992). The new primary school curriculum of 2003 and its revision form of 2005 has made the provision of 20 percent weightage for the study of local contents in social studies, creative and expressive arts, and physical education. It also made the provision of 100 percent weightage for an additional subject for a local need-based study that may include the mother language or local subject (CDC, 2005; CDC, 2010).

On the one hand, various policy documents related to school education have given importance towards the development and implementation of the local curriculum. On the other hand, the local curriculum is implemented without clear cut policy, direction and better understanding of the concerning stakeholders. However, the Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) has published directives related to the local curriculum (CDC, 2010). But it is not sufficient to understand the intent of the local curriculum. There is neither a separate provision for specific plan of human resource development with the Ministry of Education (ministry of education) for the local curriculum nor any monitoring and evaluation mechanism. Likewise, very few studies carried out on the local curriculum as known to this researcher. It is very important to conduct such studies on pros and cons of the local curriculum. Therefore, the problem under this study is highly significant to analyze the existing processes of the local curriculum development and implementation at primary level education.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative research focuses around the resource centers of Kaski district, namely, Bhandardhik Resource Centre and Barpandethum Resource Centre in the year 2015. The activity theory (Engestrom, 1999) has been adopted as an approach while the exploratory research design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) has been applied for the study.

Besides, various tools like interview, focus group discussion, and open ended

questionnaires have been made to dig out the dilemma in the policy provision of the local curriculum and its implementation. Since the “interviews allowed us to seek in depth information from the informants” (Brinkman, 2013), I have conducted the interview with the Assistant District Education Officer of Kaski and the resource person of Bhandardhik Resource Centre. Likewise, focus group discussion with head teachers and primary school teachers helped to materialize the concept and dilemma in policy provision and its implementation of local curriculum. The data have been transcribed and analyzed qualitatively (Creswell, 2012) after collecting them. Similarly, informed consent was used as ethical consideration (Flick, 2012) for the study. Since the study is based in the implementation of local curriculum of Grade 1-3 on the public schools under Bhandardhik and Barpandethum Resource Centers, no other areas have been included in this study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The result and discussion has been presented in the following paragraphs:

### **The Provision of Local Curriculum**

Primary Education Curriculum 1992 has made the provision of local curriculum at primary level education. More specifically, Primary Education Curriculum 2005 has made provision of the local curriculum. The curriculum offered one subject as a local curriculum, and schools can develop and implement local contents of 20 percentage weightage in social studies, creative and expressive arts, and physical education. But the situation is more disappointing as study (CEIR, 2010) found no school has developed and implemented their textbooks on local curriculum. However, the researcher tried to identify whether there were any practice in the local level teaching learning process by using locally developed materials. In such a process, the researcher has analysed available provisions and practice of local level authorities to develop and implementation of local curriculum. It is analysed on development of local curriculum on the following sub topic.

### **Development of Local Curriculum**

Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) has developed some guidelines for developing a primary level local curriculum on the basis of Primary Education Curriculum 2005 after the development of guidelines whether they were practicing in local level or not was the issue to identify from the implementation field. Therefore, the researcher developed two different groups: teachers and head teachers as focused groups. Then the researcher conducted discussions with them, by putting questions as relevant to local curriculum development and implement practices. The response of teachers was totally unfamiliar about local curriculum. They never got chance to involve even orientation programs. Therefore, they never participated in such activities as well.

Similarly, the head teachers were not well known about local curriculum practices. They only got an orientation program but it was not complete to practice furthermore. Likewise, the district education officer had no strong leadership on the program except conducting a workshop program. The officer had no strong determination to develop and implement the local curriculum.

However, the Curriculum Development Centre has developed the guidelines

for developing the local curriculum. Both the teachers and head teachers expressed that they have never seen such guidelines even though they can easily be found in the Curriculum Development Centre website or from the Curriculum Development Centre publication.

From the above discussions, it can be seen that the teachers and head teachers have neither got opportunities to participate in the process of local curriculum development nor have they taken initiation to develop local curriculum in their schools. But the primary education curriculum has made a provision of local curriculum as an important component of primary education curriculum.

### **Knowledge on Local Curriculum**

It is equally important that the stakeholders related to development and implementation of curriculum should have sound knowledge towards local curriculum. During the focus group discussion with teachers, the researcher asked questions, “In your opinion what is local curriculum?” “And from when was it introduced by primary education curriculum?” They were found to have responded diversely. A teacher said as follows,

In my opinion local curriculum is the curriculum that is related to local context and local needs. It covers and includes local knowledge and wisdom in the curriculum. Local production, culture, historical things, religion, and business around local area is included in local curriculum. Teachers should teach according to the existing local situation.

Similarly, the next participant teacher in the focus group discussion told the researcher that the local curriculum is the contextualization of the prepared curriculum. Another teacher added that using local knowledge and skills to teach a subject is the local curriculum. A teacher quite differently said, “I use to give local examples during my classroom instruction which is local curriculum “.

Different Informants were found to have understood local curriculum differently. Most teachers were found to have some types of knowledge towards the local curriculum. But it is amazing that none of the teachers emphasized that the local curriculum is the curriculum which is developed by the local stakeholders including the contents of local needs. Head teachers’ responses were found to have no significantly different responses from the teachers. During the interview, the assistant district education officer also opined that primary school teachers understood the intent of the local curriculum to a lesser extent or to some extent, and then understood it in an incorrect way. Therefore, it was clearly seen that the Ministry of Education as well as District Education Office never succeeded to make the clear understanding of local curriculum among primary school teachers.

From the above discussions, it is evident that the primary school teachers have little knowledge about the concept, intent, development and implementation of local curriculum in primary schools. Likewise, the Ministry of Education has failed to make a clear understanding of local curriculum to the teachers. From the views mentioned above, it can be concluded that a few of them have understood the local curriculum as the curriculum adaptation.

As the researcher conducted discussions among the focused group putting historical questions on local curriculum at primary level schools, they did not have actual knowledge about the date of provision and its assigned load as well.

### Process of Local Curriculum Development

The Curriculum Development Centre has developed the guidelines for local curriculum development in 2007 in order to implement the provision of local curriculum in primary schools. The guidelines have clearly mentioned the process of local curriculum development and implementation (CDC, 2007). According to these guidelines, schools are free to develop and revise the local curriculum as per their needs.

The head teachers were from Barpandethum Resource Centre and primary school teachers were taken from Janaprakash Resource Centre of Kaski. Likewise, the interview was taken with the resource person of Bhandradhik Resource Centre. During the focus group discussion with teachers, the questions like “Are you practicing local curriculum in your school? And what types of local curriculum are you implementing?” were asked. One of the participant teachers opined,

I am not using local curriculum in my school. No one has suggested me to apply the particular local curriculum. And we have not developed any type of local curriculum for our school. Instead, I am teaching English in substitution to the local curriculum.

Remaining other informants expressed the similar views. All the teachers as well as head teachers said that they were teaching the English subject as a substitution of local curriculum. One of the head teachers stressed,

Now the community is attracted by English medium instruction. I am planning to shift the medium of instruction into English from Nepali. So, English is being taught instead of the local curriculum in my school.

During the interview, the Assistant District Education Officer seemed to have been agreed with the view of head teachers. He added that among 22 resource centers of Kaski district, only five of them were implementing the local curriculum in their cluster schools. Remaining others were teaching English instead of implementing the local curriculum.

The Curriculum Development Centre (2007) has clearly stated that the schools should be responsible for developing the local curriculum. However, teachers, students, school management committees, teacher parent associations, and local intellectuals can be involved. The resource centers and district education office can develop the local curriculum if needs and aspirations are the same. Furthermore, the Curriculum Development Centre has made a provision of possible technical support as far as possible. But there is a contradiction that head teachers have not realized that school is sole responsible in the development and implementation of local curriculum. One of the head teachers viewed as,

I had got only a chance to participate in the local curriculum development workshop in our resource centre few years ago. At that time, we had developed the local curriculum on bamboo crafting. After that the district education office has not organized any such workshops related to the local curriculum.

Then, a probing question was asked, “If so, are you using that curriculum in your school?” He replied that attempts were made to implement it an academic session earlier. But, nowadays English is taught instead. I further asked the head teachers, if so, what they are doing about the 20 percentage weightage of local curriculum in social studies, expressive arts and physical education. They replied that they were only teaching English in substitution of 100 marks of local curriculum which

is alternating with the mother tongue. Similar responses were found to have with teachers during the focus group discussion. They were unknown about the provision of 20 percentage weightage in the three subjects. It is amazing that neither the head teachers nor the teachers have seen the guidelines developing the local curriculum prepared by the Curriculum Development Centre.

Regarding the knowledge of curriculum development process, different views were found. All the teachers and most head teachers expressed that teachers did not have any technical knowledge of the curriculum and its development process. The head teachers agreed that due to the lack of technical knowledge of curriculum, the teachers were not interested to prepare the local curriculum for them. However, the Assistant District Education Officer disagreed with this notion of the head teachers. He told that all the teachers should have at least knowledge of curriculum development process and have to be familiar with the provision of local curriculum.

From the above discussion, it is clear that teachers and head teachers have not got guidelines for developing the local curriculum. In the activity system as activity theory assumes that subjects (i.e., teachers, parents, and local elites) should actively participate in the system. But, here, these subjects were not included and rules (i.e. CDC guidelines) were not effective. So the local curriculum was not developed in schools. In the name of local curriculum, English is being taught. However, few schools were found to have practicing local curriculum prepared by them. Lack of technical knowledge of curriculum was one of the crucial barriers for developing the local curriculum. By the activity theory, there was no well managed division of labor among the concerned persons with the local curriculum. Similarly, the community (i.e. working atmosphere, resource) was one of the main effecting factors for developing the local curriculum in schools.

### **Teachers' Attitude**

Teacher is one of the main implementers of the prepared curriculum into the classroom. In the activity system as mentioned in the activity theory, the teacher is the subject and it should be active in developing the local curriculum. Motivation, enthusiasm, and continuous effort of the teacher are desirable to develop and execute the local curriculum. So, the teachers should be positive towards the provisions of the local curriculum. During the focus group discussion, there was a discussion with the teachers about their views towards it.

Most teachers were less familiar with the provision of local curriculum in primary schools. However, they talked in favor of the local curriculum. When a question, "What types of utilities do you see in the provision of local curriculum in primary school system?" was asked. The majority of the teachers were found to have been in favor of the local curriculum. However, they felt that skills and knowledge of local curriculum and its development should be provided to them. But, one of the focus group discussion participants seemed to have been unsatisfied towards the local curriculum. She said,

I am not clear about the concept of the local curriculum. I have not seen such a curriculum yet. Also I have no proper skills of its preparation. Now, it is only seen as a provision or policy of ministry of education. But in a real situation it has never been practiced. So, why should not it remove from the primary education curriculum?

Similarly, I asked the head teachers and the Assistant District Education Officer about their feelings of primary school teachers towards the local curriculum. The head teachers were not confirmed about the attitude of primary school teachers towards the local curriculum. They said that if the local curriculum was not fully practiced in schools, then how they could tell about the attitude of teachers. However, two head teachers stated that the concept of local curriculum was a good initiative and teachers were not negative towards it. But it needed to be effectively implemented in schools.

Regarding teachers' attitude towards the local curriculum, the Assistant District Education Officer seemed quite different as he opined,

I think the provision of the local curriculum is one of the most important parts of education decentralization. More specifically, it is a paradigm shift in Nepal's school level curriculum development process. So, it is the initiative of curriculum decentralization to strengthen schools, teachers and local communities. But the teachers have not realized the importance of local curriculum. So, they have become careless and the provision of local curriculum is going to be failed. Perhaps, we, the ministry of education and district education office are not successful to make teachers understanding about the concept and importance of local curriculum in primary level.

The discussion mentioned above shows that the majority of the teachers were found to have positive towards the local curriculum. Few teachers opined either to improve existing situation or remove the provision of the local curriculum from the primary school curriculum. But Assistant District Education Officer felt that teachers were less responsive and positive towards the local curriculum. In relation to the activity theory, community parts (i.e., working atmosphere, resources) of the activity system were weak. Similarly, division of labor (i.e. teachers were expected to participate in the production of the local curriculum) was also weak. So, it needs to be strengthened.

### **Classroom Practice of Local Curriculum**

The ultimate place of curriculum execution is the classroom. It is implemented by teachers inside the school classroom. Sometimes, it is also practiced outside the school or classroom. According to the Assistant District Education Officer, five resource centers prepared the local curriculum for their cluster schools. However, he was not sure whether those resource centers were actually using the local curriculum or not. He mentioned that most of the schools or communities were attracted towards running schools in English medium rather than using the local curriculum.

Regarding the sampled resource centers, i.e., Bhandardhik and Barpandethum, neither a single school developed the local curriculum nor implemented it. Instead, they were teaching English language. Parents were also happy with such a popular provision. During the focus group discussion, the head teachers and teachers told that nobody was in favour of the development and implementation of the local curriculum.

It is serious that the policy and provision of Ministry of Education in Nepal was not in practice. The provision of local curriculum remained inactive and contained it on primary education curriculum. Supervision and monitoring in schools supposed to be continuous from the government bodies. But monitoring system remained

in inertia. Nobody cared what actually was happening in the name of curriculum execution. Activity theory seeks effective interrelation between the subject and its rules, rules and division of labor, and tools and division of labor. It seems to have been very weak in developing and implementing the local curriculum in primary schools.

### **Teacher Competency**

The quality of education depends on the quality of teachers. So, it is highly important to know that the knowledge and skills are needed for the teachers. For effective teaching learning, the teachers are supposed to be equipped with the knowledge of pedagogy, assessment and curriculum, and so on. Similarly, they should be skillful to transfer the gained knowledge in their classroom instruction. This is known as the teacher competency. During the focus group discussion with head teachers and teachers, there were discussions about teacher competency and development of the local curriculum.

While a question to head teachers, “In your experience how do you found primary school teachers’ competency regarding the curriculum development and implement?” was asked during the focus group discussion, the head teachers opined different opinions about the teacher competency. Majority of them were convinced that primary school teachers lack such a competency for developing the local curriculum. Teachers were confused on organizing curriculum from local contents and knowledge. So, the development of local curriculum was not actually taking place. However, the roles of the head teachers were viewed differently. A head teacher said,

I am the only primary school teacher with the B.Ed. degree. I have good pedagogical and assessment knowledge. I can play an important role if there are clear guidelines and framework of developing the local curriculum.

During the focus group discussion with primary school teachers, two questions, “Do you think that giving responsibility of developing local curriculum to primary school teachers is relevant? Or it is a work of subject expert?” were asked. Different views were expressed there. Some teachers told that it was not relevant to give responsibility to primary teachers because curriculum development is a highly specialized and technical work. It needs subject experts. Some teachers opined differently. A teacher disagreed with the above statement and said in this way,

Teachers might have more local knowledge than the expert from the centre.

Local context and situation may not be understood by the centre. So, why should not we give responsibility to primary school teachers?

However, most primary school teachers were found to have not in favor of giving them the responsibility for developing the local curriculum. They thought that primary school teachers were still not so competent so that they were not ready to develop local curriculum for themselves. Similar views were found during the focus group discussion with head teachers and the interview, with the resource person.

The provision of the local curriculum is to promote teaching and learning opportunities for the local people as well as to encourage the schools and teachers to prepare their own curriculum for themselves. From the above discussion, it is evident that still majority of the informant teachers, head teachers and resource persons were seemed to have suspicious about the teacher’s capability and competency. Only a few



teachers were positive. Regarding the activity theory, here the subject/informants (i.e. teachers) should actively participate in the development of the local curriculum. However, the subject/informants contradict with the object (i.e. presentation, participation).

### **Needs of Local Curriculum**

Contextualization and decentralization of education is a global trend. Curriculum is one of the important components of education. School-based curriculum development practices have been conceptions since 1970s in America and Europe. In Nepal, National Education Commission (1992) initiated the needs of the local curriculum in primary level schools. A sense of ownership of schools by teachers and community members is promoted.

The guidelines for the Local Curriculum Development (2007) stated the needs of local curriculum as follows:

- Promote contents based on the social diversity
- Understand the need of individual/group/society and fulfill them
- Preserve, promote and mobilize local knowledge, culture and resource
- Make curriculum more useful and relevant and
- Increase the capacity of local individuals and institutions.

All the informants in this study had positive views in favor of the provision of local curriculum in the primary level. All the head teachers during the focus group discussion were seemed to have in favor of the local curriculum. However, they were dissatisfied with the existing situation of the local curriculum in primary schools. They stressed on revamping the existing system so that it can function well or remove it.

Some informant teachers further added that local curriculum was necessary to promote the local resources, materials, cultures, and indigenous skills. One of the participant teachers' views,

I have only heard about the local curriculum. I have neither practiced it into classroom nor got a chance to participate the same type of training, orientation and curriculum dissemination program related to local curriculum. So, if the provision can't be practiced, why should we talk about it? It is better to remove such a provision from the curriculum and teach English instead of the local curriculum.

Similarly, most head teachers viewed as mentioned above. Nonfunctioning provision of local curriculum is meaningless if it is not developed and implemented. So, we should reform and improve the provision of the local curriculum, and strictly implement it. However, resource persons and Assistant District Education Officer urged the needs of local curriculum that the provision of local curriculum is very relevant. It is felt the need of our education as well as global practice. So, it seems to be necessary to conduct comprehensive needs assessment on local curriculum and reform it depending on that study. Similar perception of teachers was found in a study by Subedi (2015).

National Education Commission (1992) emphasized the needs of incorporating the local curriculum into the existing curriculum of primary level schools. Similarly, introducing local curriculum in primary as well as in secondary level is a growing trend in the contemporary world. Participants in this study highlighted on the

promotion of local resource, and culture to a great extent. Moreover, the intent of introducing the local curriculum in primary level schools is to make curriculum more relevant and strengthen the capacity of local individuals by promoting the context based on social diversity. All the participants felt that the existing system of the local curriculum was not functioning well. So, comprehensive needs assessment should be conducted nationwide and reform the local curriculum depending on the findings. The need of the local curriculum from the eye of the activity theory was no relationship between the subject and the object, subject and rules, subject and division of labor, and community and tools.

## **CONCLUSION**

The intent of introducing the local curriculum in primary schools is to make curriculum more relevant and strengthen the capacity of local stakeholders by fostering and promoting the context-based knowledge on social diversity. The mandatory provisions of local curriculum in primary schools remained on policy only as a nonfunctional intervention to promote the local knowledge. Therefore, the local curriculum is not being practiced in primary schools. So, the contextualization and decentralization is a recent global trend of education in general and curriculum in particular, which is in dilemma. Such dilemma exists in choices between the local curriculum and popular trend of teaching English language instead of the local curriculum.

It is amazing that no any schools or resource centers had neither designed nor implemented the local curriculum. Instead, all the schools are replacing the local curriculum by teaching English language. One of the main reasons behind such practice is the lack of technical knowledge of concerned stakeholders as well as poor or nonexistent mentoring and supervisory practices from government agencies. Ultimately, this created the inertia in designing and execution of the local curriculum at primary level schools. However, head teachers and teachers are seemed positive towards the provision of local curriculum at primary level schools to preserve, promote and mobilize the local knowledge.

It is concluded that teachers as well as the head teachers lack an adequate knowledge and skill in designing the local curriculum. Similarly, they have not informed and familiar with the guidelines on local curriculum prepared by the Curriculum Development Centre. Surprisingly, they perceived that designing curriculum needs high skills and it is the duty of concerned experts not theirs.

Nationwide comprehensive needs assessment on local curriculum is essential to find out the root causes of unexecuted policy provisions of the local curriculum. There is a dire need of establishing framework for promoting and disseminating on the various dimensions of the local curriculum, which is desirable. Similarly, developing and practicing the mobile application can be an initial step in dissemination of the information with the teachers and head teachers of primary schools.

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