

Policy paradox between local and national agencies of education: A lived experiences from local curriculum development practices in Nepal

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Abstract

National agency seems authoritative to devise curriculum through local agency in Nepal. National agency prepares the continuum of activities and philosophy that how to achieve the national goals of education through its curriculum documents. This paper focuses on the policy paradox of national and local agencies of education during the development and implementation process of local curriculum. Local agencies perceive local curriculum development policy as an emancipatory issue. The “third agency”, society expects alike and perceive this process as a political game of curriculum. The policy tussles between national and local agencies reflect that national emancipatory consciousness is meticulous and it does not motivate in the contribution of local.

Key Words: local curriculum, national agency, local agency, “social agency”

1. National Curriculum Agency and Issues of conflict

National agencies in the centralized education system are more authoritative to devise curriculum and disseminate culture to their citizens. Agency in this large sense is the independent power of the individual human being to intervene in the ongoing flow of events and make a difference to them (Barnes, 2001). CDC (Curriculum Development Center) is the functional body that develops appropriate curricula, textbooks and other instructional materials required for job oriented, student-centered, practical, life skills oriented, vocational, competitive and qualitative school education

(CDC, 2018). Centralized curriculum do not take into account those key elements characteristic of the context, which in many occasions represent the diverse needs of students and teachers; and hinder the success of any curriculum improvement initiative (Marsh, 2009). It is producing 'texts' for educating people that are determined to integrate the needs and interest of students in school education through learner-centered teaching-learning process from its inception (ibid) and also, is responsible to develop a policy framework and education materials. Therefore, CDC combines the need of the nation and preparation for the human resources which explicitly are core policy objectives of national agencies of education in their texts. Can whether texts represent the real needs? Texts are not simply 'delivery systems' of 'facts'. They are at once the results of political, economic, and cultural activities, battles, and compromises. They are conceived, designed, and authored by real people with real interests (Apple, 2000, p. 43). It does not necessarily cater the real need of the people as perceived by the national agencies as curriculum is the educational experiences jointly created by students and teachers (Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992,). Local agencies are supposed to implement text of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) through 'hidden curriculum' (Jackson, 1986). It is one of the vital and best ways that education maintains an elite class system. It refers to the standards of the proper behavior for a society or culture that are taught within the school system. For several decades, the hidden curriculum has a great impact on school education in the context of Nepal. The term hidden curriculum was meant to describe the ways in which behavior is normalized through school and classroom structures and practices (Gottesman, 2012, p. 574). Stabbing to acculture different nationalities and lingual minorities to the national mainstreaming educational domain has been a normal phenomenon. Therefore, local agencies should be supported by other means like inclusive policy.

The main focus of this paper is to raise the concerns from the viewpoint of the local agencies. Indeed, agency may be assigned to non-humans, whereupon they become actors, presumably with powers of assignation themselves, whatever that may imply (Barnes, 2001). School Management Committee, Resource Person, Head Teacher and teachers as local agencies are supposed to execute national policies. It devised a policy to empower and liberate local agencies by providing opportunities to develop local curriculum as per the need of the local community, culture, economy, business, ethnicity or language, different cultural and local histories (Akkerman & Bakker, 2012) have been menacing to local curriculum development. Scholars suggest to involve an audit approach to curriculum development and arguably encouraging a culture of strategic compliance (Priestley 2010). Although, policy documents have stated that local agencies need to follow the guidelines of national agencies to develop curriculum. It is therefore, curriculum development must not only be ruled by theory alone thus explaining the process of devising, planning and selecting the elements, techniques, and procedures that constitute an organized learning endeavor. Curriculum development needs to be considered as research, like other design-based research (Diamond & Powell, 2011). The NCF consists of the principles and guidelines for developing, implementing and revising the national school curriculum and assessment based on a comprehensive review of the context and concerns of educational development with reference to national needs and international perspectives (2007, p.3). The policy ambiances for its national and international connections through the local curriculum. Apple (1971) argues that how an unrealistic and basically consensus-

oriented perspective is taught through a 'hidden curriculum' in schools (p. 27). Curriculum development contains distinct and identifiable elements which two of them are the ability to design a set of learning activities within general provincial state guidelines with community groups, school, stakeholders, leaders, teachers and students. Consequently, the cordial phenomenon is lacking to apply texts and paradoxes are rising out of this policy. Acquiring and implementing a curriculum designs process that is phenomenologically rooted requires autonomy on the part of the curriculum designer. Prospect teachers have to become their own educational architects rather than relying on higher authority prescriptions for what and how to teach.

2. Theoretical basis and methodology

The research is conducted in three different districts of Nepal namely Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Dang. This case can be considered as a 'unique case' (Yin, 2011), since it covers a distinctive curriculum practice. Those districts were practicing to develop local curriculum, due mainly to this reason, three public schools were chosen for research. In the schools of Kathmandu and Lalitpur, they are practicing 'tourism' activity as their local curriculum. In Dang district, language was focused on the local curriculum in studied school. From all sampled schools, headteacher, teachers (who were involved into teaching and developing local content for curriculum), one member of school management committee and one from the community member of the school areas respectively were the respondents. Furthermore, resource person of the school clustered area and district education officer were also chosen for the in-depth interview. This research might not represent the private school's curriculum due to the limitation of the local curriculum development process that was held by public schools. The theoretical foundation of this research has backed up by the major thoughts critical social theories such as of Michael Apple, in curriculum and politics to raise the voice from the minority and local stakeholders.

3. The debate of content versus context

NCF has delegated the supremacy to choose the content or context for the schools under local curriculum. Tyler was among the first curriculum theorists to conceive the curriculum process in terms of student learning and social conditions rather than subject matter alone (Tyler, 1949). To develop curriculum several frameworks have been proposed to guide developers in designing curriculum (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; McKenney & Reeves, 2013). Content and context both are equally important in the school education. But more specifically content is paramount in the multicultural classroom. Content is wholistic documents that resemble the common cultural learning. A 'common culture' can never be an extension to everyone of what a minority mean and believe (Apple, 2000, p. 55). As a multicultural land multilingual classroom, content has created a lot of hurdles which is not only through the textbooks but also by the teachers' efficacy and cultural beliefs. Therefore, the teachers involved in curriculum organization may need to create lesson plans and syllabi within the framework of the given curriculum since teachers' responsibilities are to implement the curriculum to meet students' needs. For example, a school student from an ethnic minority can not think about the mainstreaming cultural practices that causes him or her unable to understand due to lack of knowledge and exposure. Teachers' professionalism and cultural frame of

reference are critical in this sense. As Timperley, Wilson, Barrar and Fung (2008) suggest professional development is an intentional, ongoing and systematic process. The level of teacher's dedication and commitment in curriculum development will lead to effective achievement of educational policy.

In the contextual curriculum, learners are encouraged to learn within the compatible environment for learning. This compatible environment for learning is mainly associated with community centered, learner-centered (Chairani, 2015) and knowledge centered. Community-centered learning environment helps the learners to be a good social member. Thus, it helps to justify to curriculum from the perspective of community members. Similarly, the learning-centered environment is widely discussed and focal part of the contextual curriculum where learners use cognitive way of knowing the truth by linking the history with present context. In this sense, contextual curriculum enhances the social and or public pedagogy (Giroux, 2004) and personal pedagogy (Crick, 2009) for the contextual learners. Contextual learners set the environment of learning where knowledge is connected with the context. Apple (2000) argues that "our aim should not to create 'functional literacy', but critical literacy, powerful literacy, political literacy which enables the growth of genuine understanding and control of all the spheres of social life in which we participate" (p.42).

Witnessing the importance of curriculum contextualization, which incorporates the local knowledge, skill, pedagogy and resources utilization that directly benefits to learning. Our conceptual and analytic tools must acknowledge the importance of the local. This is a call for a multiplicity of a critical case and teacher practitioner studies, across nation, race, region, class, gender, and local circumstances that highlight the contexts, conditions, and processes of teaching; learn from them (Weber, 2008, p. 300).

The learning contexts have been linked with different social-cultural elements such as language, skills, and ethno-methods and practices. For an instance, Department of Education (2005) stated that the need of contextual curriculum is inevitable in the multilingual country Nepal to fulfill the gap of perception and practice among the teachers, students, and parents. However, the misunderstandings among these different stakeholders of curricular activities create the more confusion in contextual curriculum practice. It reported that parents consciously say, it will be easier to understand Nepali than MT [mother tongue]. Teachers, they feel difficult to teach in MT because they are not good at using MT. Students were not motivated to be multilingual where they were taught in MT. It is because of the use of only one MT in the multilingual class. This is the challenging side of curriculum contextualization in multicultural-social context. Therefore, teachers often face difficult contradictions in their work as a result of conflicting policy imperatives (Reeves 2008). In the studied school of Dang district, they have prepared local content for a local language (i.e. *Tharu Language*) which later, seemed less effective in any classroom.

Crawford (2001) explained about the five core concepts (Fig. 1) for constructing new knowledge through the contextualized model of curriculum. Learners' prior knowledge and experiences are

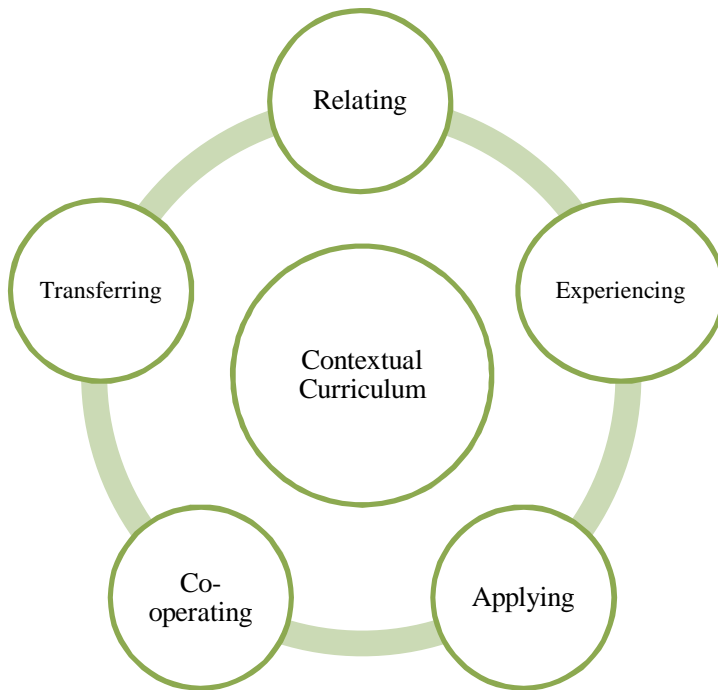


Fig. 1 Core concepts of contextual curriculum

of the learning. Therefore, learners can internalize the cognitive knowledge, skill and develop the attitude with the context- based learning. This conceptual model enhances the ability of learners, so in doing that, emphasizes practical and functional skills (Chairani, 2015) And also, promotes group discussion, problem-solving skills and transfer of knowledge. Obviously, the content and context dichotomy have both pros and cons in the studied schools. However, local curriculum in Nepalese context that should focus on the contextual learning with relevant content, which is more substantial concerns at the local level teaching and learning pedagogies.

related to generating new knowledge in the present context. To contextualize learners' prior experiences to generate new knowledge is the meta-cognition process of learning. The important factor that how learners' experience in the classroom is challenging for the contextual learning. The learning environment and level of learners affect the learning outcomes in this model. So, learners know how to apply the knowledge and experience in the context of the reason that why is it important and what sorts of materials or objects are medium for applying knowledge and skills. For this propose, learners must share and interact with one another. They require forming group and work in the panel, field or in the real-time situation to ensure the cooperative nature

4. Constructing knowledge through contextualization: A global viewpoint

For long, one of the major challenges for curriculum development is creating balance and consistency between the various arrangements of a curriculum (Van den Akker 2003; 2005; 2010). During the field study, parents reflected that they wish to make their children as the global citizen and less interest to use local content or context. They perceive language and content or context should be more oriented to the global access so that their children can compete for the global economic sphere in the future. This literally shows the interest of the society in English than local language. Therefore, what is the contestation between local and global is also vibrating issue for the local curriculum development implementation policy. This is a fairly new phenomenon in the context of Nepal. In Chinese schools, the central government has delegated the right of curriculum development to the schools. Schools are autonomous to develop and make it contextual according to their need and demand. Their school-based curriculum development practice carries a certain

portion of the content, pedagogy from the contextual phenomenon or local socio-cultural settings. Nanzhao and Muju (2007) state:

“Local authorities and schools have had greater autonomy in curriculum development, implementation and management in light of local/school-specific contexts and of learners’ development needs. The proportion of total class hours for ‘local curriculum’ and ‘school-based curriculum’...” (p. 30).

An ecological approach to syllabus development which highlights features such as common decisions made by teachers and students is School Based Curriculum Development (Skilbeck, 1984). The Philippines; a country with multilingual and multicultural features systematized and succeeded in contextualizing curriculum in schools. It incorporated local relevant contents like local languages, culture, practices, dance, and music in its curriculum. However, these practices are only observed and implemented in different regions whose language or dialect is not Filipino. The medium of instruction in these places is in their local dialect, so students will have a better understanding and the local teachers will be able to explain the subject matter with much thought and understanding. A report of UNESCO published that in Philippines individual schools are provided rights to develop and redesign the curriculum (UNESCO, 2003). Although, not necessary; allocating rights and autonomy to the schools that ensures curriculum contextualization rather it supports to make it localized with respect to language, content, pedagogy, and teaching and learning materials. Sometimes allocating autonomy to schools helps to enhance the universalized curriculum. Some of the views are in-between where global and contextual both move side by side as there is developing hybrid educational practices combining the local and the global (Spring, 2008, p. 353).

A debate between localization and globalization brought up some critical issues. Different understandings and perceptions from different level have fostered the practicality of the debate such as local prosperity is their basic rights and needs too. Some others perceive as the globalization would be better for the worldly phenomenon. Rests would perhaps prefer the glocalization, the combination of local and global. But it is relative and perceptive. It depends on the perception of the local people, is assumed that “local knowledge [with] global relevance can lead to global knowledge” (Cordova & Matthiesen, 2010, p. 462). Both local and global entities need to merge for the existence of local and global. Local knowledge with global recognition and global knowledge with local relevancy would be the better resolution of local-global debate.

The concept of localization and globalization are relative that some would favor the globalization and some other prefers the localization. Both of the concepts have pros and cons as well. Here, the discussion is elaborated about the concepts of localization and globalization. Globalization is ‘process of blurring’ of the nation-states. The ‘process of blurring’ means mixture and openness of state boundaries, exchange of culture, language, trade, food, education, politics and so on. The race of development in globalization is set in position-based policy that would not support anyone for progress. “The ‘global community’ is a community of individuals where everyone starts a race and the individuals who finish first and last deserve what they get” (Tierney, 2004, p. 16). The race of nation-states in globalization is the race of freedom. No, any state would be looser or winner in the race. Rather it is an open structure of social, political, economic and cultural relationships. The position of the states (competitor) is predefined.

Globalization is borderless and an open society. Everyone (nation-states) can join or leave the process of globalization. Fundamentally, national and local priorities are minimized in this process. A mass society with the similar features is created. Globalization, thus, can be characterized as an ocean. Nation-states swim and try to win the competition. There is no border in the ocean of globalization. Tierney (2004) defined “[g]lobalization is a social process where the nation-state as the unit of economic, political, and cultural analysis becomes less important, or even irrelevant, and in its place, are borderless worldwide social relations” (p. 9).

Universalized curriculum emphasizes local needs and an identity in the school education. Ownership of the local people can be consisted by emphasizing the needs and identity of local to maintain sustainability and we-feeling. The other ways, the process of teaching and learning should also be compatible with the content and available resources. Teaching and learning of such contents and available resources enhance the local and indigenous practices. So, curriculum needs to be developed through the process of combination of local content and pedagogy. Apple (2000) opines "for most people, literacy has a non-political function. It is there supposedly to help from the intellectual character of a person and to provide paths to upward mobility" (p. 42). It has contextual meaning and mindset. Thus, education in globalization is also blurred and borderless. Nation-states cannot be confined within the national framework of education. The national framework may not be completed to produce global citizen. It seems not effective to provide the framework for education by individual nation-states. It cannot define knowledge because nation-states seek the global adaptation. So, the role of an individual nation-state is confined.

5. Perception of the local: A threshold of debate

The perception of stakeholders in curriculum development and implementation framework is contradictorily discarded by the teachers. To ensure effective implementation of a prescribed curricular program (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; Miller, 1990) teachers seem reluctant to receive it as a course or training. Among them, the head teacher, subject teacher, and community members reflected their understandings about contextualized curriculum. In the discussion with the teachers, who are the practitioner or the facilitator of the curriculum; they reflected that to follow contextual curriculum, methods, and evaluation system is overload in their work schedule. They felt that they already have lots of work burden and to think about local curriculum is extra work in their daily teaching activities. Rather, applying new teaching pedagogy and context-based learning approach, s/he is habituated to follow the traditional method and pattern to teach syllabi in the classroom. According to the Supovitz and Weinbaum (2008) it is an implementation gap between policy intentions and classroom practice. The understanding of English teachers about the contextualized curriculum seems different than other ‘creative’ teacher. Contextualized curriculum is the process and method that helps students to make a connection between their studies in the classroom with everyday life. Teachers are supposed to facilitate them to demonstrate linkage in the prior

knowledge and present learning activities and outcomes. There should be vital advancement in teachers' level of dedication in order to actively reflect on society's needs. Teachers' willingness is an important factor contributing to the success of curriculum development and implementation. Community member of the school area reflected their excitement in the discussion to making curriculum contextualize. They perceived that local curriculum can include local things in classrooms as per the need of society. Teachers can mobilize surroundings resources and make teaching-learning more effective. From the reflection of community members, the contextualized curriculum can be developed as the need-based curriculum to address the need of the society. It can help flourish the locality, surroundings and local heritage. On the other, contextualized curriculum develops the sense of affiliation to the community with the curriculum and education

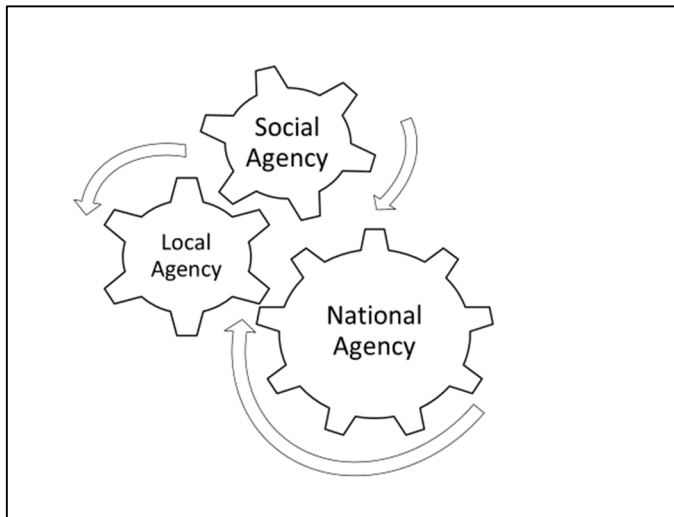


Fig. 2 Logical Process of Agencies

system. The feeling of ownership with the curriculum which uses local pedagogy, resources, and examples, is reflected in the view of the community member. Unfortunately, there is no such use of local objects in particular teaching except some readymade materials from the market. Therefore, community members are not satisfied with the things that are found in their locality. The logical coherence of agencies is not in the cohesive direction (Fig. 2). So, it has reverse effects for developing and implementing local curriculum. The interest in the global

knowledge, ideas and access are highly desirable to the locals. Through the local context, they want to shift instantly into the global sphere. They want their children to study and work in the international community, so they need the global consciousness and knowledge.

One of the studied schools developed and followed context-based curriculum about 'tourism' which was directly associated with the community profession. In this contextual curriculum, students were assigned to do project work, field visit, tour, local excursion, live-classroom study and so on to get knowledge about the tourism and its concerned businesses. It seemed easy for the students who are learning this subject because most of their family members were engaged in the same profession. They could understand it appropriately and help to their parents in business. Students were excited and seemed benefitted from this kind of teaching and learning in the classroom. But the school has allocated one period in a week for this curriculum and rest of the periods and course books were as same as in many schools in Nepal where they followed the traditional pattern of teaching and learning.

Then our query turned into the head teachers of the school why they were not being able to extend those types of classes in their subjects or subject matter. Responding to our concern, the head teachers reacted unclear policy of schools for academic evaluation which was largely based on text-book examination. They felt that the need of changing pattern of evaluation systems for those

kinds of curriculum. The other, it is a financial burden to school due to extra resources utilization for transport and teacher. They wish to extend but lack technical and financial support from the national agencies. There is lacking skilled teacher, who are eager to demonstrate their creativity, vigor, and willingness to work in a creative way.

The conventional teaching and learning practices in the school are being 'time-consuming'. Teachers are not in favor of creative things and innovative pattern of teaching at present due to new unknown concepts are introduced; many teachers encounter difficulty in transferring and processing knowledge and information (UNESCO, 2003, p. 37). This is because of lack of creativity in teaching and learning pedagogies. The traditional approach of teaching and learning is preferred rather than having exposure to a new approach like student-centered and or critical pedagogies. So, teachers' attitude, willingness, and interest need to arise to cope of with the new changes in the curriculum and its pedagogical practices even in the case of a contextualized curriculum. To raise the level of creativity and innovative skills among the teachers, curriculum contextualization must be included in the teacher training agenda (Mouraz & Leite, 2013, p. 10) that might ensure the optimal implication of curriculum contextualization in our context.

6. The crux of debates between national and local agencies

It's factual that local agencies are not interacting with society to enhance the capability of local curriculum project. As the theory of structure and agency suggests that it is necessary that individuals are not the dopes of rules, that they have agency in the specific, narrow sense of being active in relation to rules and norms and not predictably compliant with them (Barnes, 2001). Hence, as an individual, teachers are accused of not being energetic and innovative enough to make it successful for the betterment of society. They do not want to change the position what they are getting at present moment. Its hidden psyche of the teachers that they want to work as the conventional pattern of teaching and learning. However, the third agency i.e. social has expected their children as a global citizen with global competencies in future because conflicts over texts are often proxies for wider questions of power relations (Apple 2000, p. 45). The indication of third agency is not to include local contents in their study matters rather be a more global orientation in the classroom teaching and learning. However, they are not able to answer how can they contribute to the improvement of curriculum texts. Therefore, policy for the localization of curriculum is not relevant to the social needs and as collective agency. Collective agency that engenders the cultural and institutional order intrinsic to human life (Barnes, 2001). What policy has adopted by the national agency is loosely granted by the local agency and the third agency is distinctively expecting global access. It's a game that education and power are terms of an indissoluble couplet. It is at times of social upheaval that this relationship between education and power becomes most visible (Apple, 2000, p. 44).

7. Concluding Remarks

CDC has focused on local curriculum on their texts which is more dominant by theoretical stance rather than the coordination with local agencies. These texts are not simply representing the need of locals. The status of the responsible agent is the most rudimentary of all social statuses, and the

crucial default status of the institution of responsible action. As such, it is a vital focus for the attribution of responsibilities, for praise and blame according to how they are met and for demands for response when failure to fulfil them gives rise to damage to others (Barnes, 2001). The study found that to shifting content to context-based curriculum, central agencies are not contributing as such. Agencies in a local level are given to formulating the local content but which is more conventional way of learning activity. The local curriculum has not been fully granted by the local and social agencies. Society is aware of global happenings and information, so they expect global access to their children through local education system. Locals are more comfortable with 'tourism' than 'Tharu Language' curriculum which seemed reliable and effective to their daily business. On the one hand, lack of creativity and innovation in the classroom teaching, teachers disinclined towards local curriculum development and implementation process. Except for the central agencies, local and social agencies are not also in good coordination to raise the level of consensus to resolve the issue on the other. Social agency perceives this policy as the political transmutation and local agencies lack financial resources and professional competencies that enhances the more policy debate than the developing and implementing curriculum framework by central agencies.

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