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Local Curriculum and Mother Tongue Education in Nepal

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Abstract

Local curriculum and mother tongue education are the outcomes of democratic system that formally began in the decade 1950, however, utilized in the decade of 1990s after accomplished the people movement of 1990. The study analyzes the nexus and relevancy of mother tongue education in local curriculum in basic level school education. To complete the research descriptive research design has been followed and the study was based on secondary sources of data gathered through library research method. Both local curriculum and mother tongue-based curriculum focus on local issue including local language and knowledge so it is better to integrate local curriculum with the provision of mother tongue education.

Keywords: Local curriculum, mother tongue education, Nepal

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Introduction

Local curriculum supports students to manage their local needs. Around the world there are various models of local curriculum that practice for the class room purpose. UNESCO Report (2008) highlights the three models that are related to language, traditional skill and day to need. Local curriculum should include either local language, skill or the matter that need to sustain in certain locality. But in the context of Nepal local curriculum neither includes local language, skill and locality-based knowledge nor the mother tongue. It only follows the national grid of local curriculum which is almost similar to the previous one. The study analyzes the relevancy and nexus of mother tongue and local curriculum. In the context of Nepal mother tongue education can only fulfil the demand of local curriculum by addressing local issues like language, culture and indigenous knowledge. Issue of mother tongue education and local curriculum was materialized in Nepal after promulgation of the constitution of Nepal 1990. In this regard, Subedi (2015) notes,

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.

Mother tongue education began in Nepal after the reestablishment of democracy in 1990. The constitution made provision as, "Each community shall have the right to operate schools up to the primary level in its own mother tongue for imparting education to its children" (Constitution of Nepal 1990, Article 18, 2). Not only the constitutional provision but also other reasons mother tongue education system was introduced in Nepal. Some of the reasons of using mother tongue education in school level mentioned by Phyak (2007) as, "The major reason behind mother tongue education includes helping children learn by breaking barriers of language in the school and preserves and promotes endangered languages through education." The constitution of Nepal (1990) not only recognized the mother tongues as national languages but also clearly noted the rights to operate mother tongue schools up to primary level.

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It recommended to begin language planning for the development of national languages and to employ them on education as instructional medium as well as to identify the possible domains for the national languages. Mother tongue schools up to primary level shall be opened in the areas where there are monolingual students.

Yadava and Grove suggested to operate mother tongue school in monolingual community. Like that UNSCO focuses on that issue but in practice the situation is different. Local curriculum only covers the issues like national curriculums such as history, geography, culture and economic situation rather than the core issue of mother tongue speakers and their particular knowledge system.

In constitution making process of constitutional assembly these issues have been discussed in center level but in the constitution making period political parties neglect the value of mother tongue and restructure the state on the basis of their political interest rather than the demand of

people and time. In the constitution of Nepal 2015 made the provision of mother tongue education and local curriculum as contradictory form that creates gap in implementation of mother tongue education in Nepal. The constitution of Nepal 2015 notes the provision of mother tongue education in such way, "Languages of the nation: All languages spoken as the mother tongues in Nepal are the languages of the nation. (Constitution of Nepal, 2015 Article 6,1). In the same way in article 31 " rights of education" make provision in this way, " (5) Every Nepalese community residing in Nepal shall have the right to get education in its mother tongue and, for that purpose, to open and operate schools and educational institutes, in accordance with law." (Constitution of Nepal 2016 Article 31, 5). These provision highlights the provision of mother tongue, however, in practice using mother tongue in formal education is more difficult than the past. Previous local unites Village development committee and municipalities are restructured in a big form with covering big territory and multiple culture. Newly formed local bodies made with merging many multilingual areas. Except few, most of the local bodies cover the multilingual area that make difficult to lunch mother tongue school education in local bodies. In center level, various acts and rules have been formulated to enhance education system including local curriculum, however, the authorities and government officials are not positive toward the implementation of mother tongue education and undermine the value of mother tongue education. In this context, it is relevant to quote Phyak (2007) about the importance of mother tongue as:

The language(s) that one has learnt first; the language(s) one identifies with or is identified as a native speaker of by others; the language(s) one knows best and the language(s) one uses most. 'Mother tongue' may also be referred to as 'primary' or 'first language'. The term 'mother tongue' is commonly used in policy statements and in the general discourse on educational issues. The language of instruction in school is the medium of communication for the transmission of knowledge.

It clarifies that local knowledge and culture only sustain with mother tongue otherwise it lost or transformed into others. But the education policies and rules focus on the grid which is neither mother tongue friendly nor any new form. It only repeats the previous one in a new form.

National education policy mentions certain points including local language, local culture but the guidelines of *Local Curriculum (2007)* focused on decentralization of centralized previously existed education system. The constitution of Nepal 2015 made provision to handle basic education by local government that mentioned the provision in schedule 8 point no 8 as' "(Relating to clause (4) of Article 57, clause (2) of Article 214, clause (2) of Article 221 and clause (1) of Article 226) 8-Basic and secondary education"(Constitution of Nepal 2015, Schedule-8). Similarly, in point no 22 of the same schedule constitution provides to the rights of preserving language, culture and fine art that, "Protection and development of languages, cultures and fine arts " Constitution of Nepal 2015, Schedule-8, 22). Current practice of local bodies could not address the both constitutional provisions.

Local government was formed on the basis of constitution and these bodies started function in 2017 after completed the election of local bodies. On the basis of existing education acts and

rules, local curriculums are made by local government on the basis of certain guideline. The guidelines that prescribe by the government as follows:

Should be responsive to the needs, identity, language, culture, interests, strengths and aspirations of your learners and their families. Should have a clear focus on what supports the progress of all learners. Should help learners engage with the knowledge, values, and competencies so they can go on and be confident and connected lifelong learners (*The local curriculum: Resource and training manual 2007, p.3*).

Certain features of curriculum are similar whether it is national, international or local because it prepares for teaching learning purpose. Simply, curriculum means a course of study of certain teaching learning subject. In this regard, Subedi (2015) notes, "The word is derived from the Latin word meaning 'racecourse' or 'race', and has come to mean a general course, conveying the notion of going somewhere in a predefined direction." This traditional notion of curriculum is changed and new concept of curriculum introduced in the world. Now curriculum is not only related to the pre-defined direction it also leads new and unknown course of knowledge. Concept of local curriculum is based on the new concept of curriculum that is different from traditional or religion-based curriculum.

Nepali educators have been experienced the centralized curriculum development system for decades. However, centralized curriculum development process is being criticized as failed to make relevant curriculum as per the needs of the local society. Marsh & Wills, (1999) note, "Making curriculum in diverse society is one of the challenging tasks for educationalists." In the process of making school level curriculum, there should actively participate educationists, teachers and parents but in Nepal only certain individual are involved to make so called grid that cannot fulfil the good aspect of curriculum. Some aspects should be addressed in a good curriculum that Skilbeck (1984) notes "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." More than that local curriculum should address the local interest and should relevant to local context. Local curriculum focuses locality which is more natural than national curriculum. In teaching local issues as curriculum, teacher and students need to use local language or mother tongue which is more self-expressive and natural than the learned language. UNESCO (1953) notes the medium of natural learning as, "The best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue or any other language a child understands well. The mother tongue is the natural means of self-expressions of the experiences and thoughts learnt in childhood." Education polices are not clear about the local curriculum and its teaching learning medium. Khadaka, (2018) briefly summarizes the education laws and its provisions that directly or indirectly influences both mother tongue medium of teaching learning or local curriculum as:

Nepal along with the nations of the world expressed its commitment for Education for All (EFA) by the year 2015. The policy makers have become aware that the EFA goals could not be achieved unless the mother tongues are employed as the instructional medium at the early basic education. The same spirit is reflected on the National curriculum framework

(2005) and School Sector Reform Plan (2009). The Multilingual Education Implementation Guidelines (2010) etc. Showing its commitment towards various international conventions (Universal Declaration of Human Rights-1948; Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (EFA)- 1990; Dakar Framework of Action-2000; Millennium Development Goals-2000 and UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007) and national constitutional provision and policies (Interim Constitution of Nepal-2007; Three Year Interim Plan -2008; EFA Core Document-2004-2009; EFA National Plan of Action-2003; Tenth Plan-2002-2007 and National Curriculum Framework for School Education in Nepal (NCF) - 2007.

Mother tongue instruction does not only remain as medium but also covers the contents of local curriculum because mother tongue is itself matter of certain respected community rather than technical instrument of expression. A person can express his/ her idea, knowledge system through mother tongue. UNESCO Report (2000) mentioned Dakar Framework for Action that recognized the need to use basic education in mother tongue as local curriculum as:

To reach those belonging to ethnic minorities to make education contextually located and locally accessible. Learners who understand the language they are instructed in are more likely to engage meaningfully with content, question what they do not understand and even enjoy the challenge of new things.

There is nexus between local language and local curriculum. Without using local language or mother tongue it is impossible to teach local content in a respected particular community. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) (2000) also notes that "people learn best when they are taught in a language they understand well" (p. 3). In the context of Nepal, the guidelines for the Local Curriculum Development (2007) notes basic features of local curriculum as:

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 institution (p. 4).

Above mentioned guideline also focuses the issue like promoting local knowledge and the fulfilment of the need of local people. In the context of Nepal local knowledge is linked with certain indigenous community that can only express through mother tongue. So, in the absence of mother tongue education local curriculum cannot fulfill its' objectives and relevancy. But local bodies and curriculum expert try to separate local curriculum with mother tongue education.

CBS report 2011 identified 123 linguistic communities in Nepal however only ten language speakers are more than 2% and other languages are minority language. Census, 2011 showed speakers of ten major languages are as:

There are 123 languages spoken as mother tongue reported in census 2011. Nepali is spoken as mother tongue by 44.6 percent (11,826,953) of the total population followed by

Maithili (11.7% 3,092,530), Bhojpuri (6.0%; 1,584,958), Tharu (5.8%; 1,529,875), Tamang (5.1%; 1,353,311), Newar (3.2%; 846,557), Bajjika (3.0%; 793,418), Magar (3.0%; 788,530), Doteli (3.0%; 787,827), Urdu (2.6%; 691,546) (p., 4).

Above data indicate that local bodies can easily make local curriculum in the ten languages but in practice few local bodies used mother tongue education in basic level. Others are in the process of preparing local curriculum. In a single district there are more than five local bodies and all the local bodies are competitively engaged in the formation of local curriculum. Except few cases structure and contents of local curriculum is almost similar to the national curriculum because grid of local curriculum is prepared by top level. Center level administration of education forcefully separates the local curriculum with mother tongue education; however, some aspects of local curriculum is inseparable with mother tongue education. Preserving local knowledge through local curriculum is almost impossible without mother tongue education. So, education administration should be mindful about the nexus between local curriculum and mother tongue education.

In the name of decentralization of education system, each of the local bodies are investing in local curriculum without long lasting effect of the course. Three levels government of Nepal including non-government organization are silently observing the activities and resource will be misusing in the name of making curriculum. There are various researches on curriculum including local curriculum but I have not found authentic research on issue of local curriculum and its necessary number like that how many local curricula will be needed in Nepal in basic level? and n does all the local bodies are capable to make local curriculum. Curriculum practice indicates that locally made curriculum is referred as local curriculum" that is wrong concept and practice. In upcoming days that raise question on the relevancy of local curriculum in Nepal. Confusion and doubt should be erased from center level about mother tongue education and local curriculum because local curriculum should be prepared to preserve local language, culture and locality-based knowledge. It cannot break the nexus of local curriculum and mother tongue education.

Conclusion

Ongoing local curriculum making process of Nepal cannot fulfil the objectives of local curriculum unless merging with mother tongue education, however, structure of the most of local bodies are multilingual. Even if, catchment areas of some basic level schools are still on the domination of monolingual community. In this context, mother tongue language can be used as the medium of instruction in teaching local curriculum. Both issues of local curriculum and mother tongue education are the outcomes of decentralization so that it need not separate each other. Before prepared and lunched the local curriculum in a certain school concerned government authority, educationists, parents, school management committee should be clear about needs and outcomes of the local curriculum but till the time none of the authentic and reliable research have been made about the matter. There is a big question mark before us about the number and content coverage of local curriculum like how many local curricula can be needed in a province or district and why all the local bodies are eager to make local curriculum. Except some local bodies most of

the local bodies are concentrated on investing resources and fulfilling the requirement of government. Academic circles, educationists, activists and silence on the matter and only government units are engaged on it. We cannot imagine the existence of local curriculum in the context of Nepal without addressing the issue of mother tongue education because local knowledge, skills and local needs are directly or indirectly related to certain mother tongue speakers' communities rather than common Nepali speakers.

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