

Integrating Local and Indigenous Knowledge into School Education: A Case Study of Local Curriculum Implementation in Bhajani Municipality, Nepal

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Abstract

The integration of local and Indigenous knowledge into school education has become an important educational priority in Nepal following the introduction of local curricula under the federal education system. While Nepal's education system has long been influenced by globalization and externally driven educational reforms, recent educational policies have increasingly emphasized the promotion of Indigenous knowledge, local culture, and community identity through school education. This study explores the implementation of the municipality-developed local curriculum at Mahunyal Secondary School in Bhajani Municipality, Kailali District, with particular attention to its inclusiveness within a multicultural context.

A qualitative case study design was employed. Data were collected through classroom and participant observations, semi-structured interviews with four teachers, four students, two school administrators, and two members of the local curriculum development committee, as well as document analysis of the municipality's local curriculum, *Bhajani Ko Paribesh*. Although the curriculum has been implemented across the basic education level, this study focused specifically on Grades 6–8.

The findings indicate that, despite the successful introduction of the local curriculum, its implementation is constrained by inadequate teacher preparation, the absence of teacher guidebooks, limited instructional materials, and insufficient institutional support. The study further reveals that the curriculum predominantly represents the cultures and traditions of the major local communities while providing limited representation of minority groups, including the Muslim, Yadav, Kathariya, Magar, and Raji communities. In addition, some curriculum content overlaps with topics already covered in the national curriculum, reducing its contextual relevance.

The study concludes that local curricula should move beyond cultural preservation toward a more inclusive multicultural approach that equitably represents diverse communities while integrating local and Indigenous knowledge, skills, and cultural practices. Strengthening teachers' professional capacity, revising curriculum content, and enhancing the active engagement of local governments are essential for the meaningful integration of local knowledge into school education.

Keywords: Inclusive education; Indigenous knowledge; Local curriculum; Local knowledge; Multicultural education.

Introduction

Education systems worldwide are increasingly expected to respond not only to economic development and global competitiveness but also to cultural diversity, social inclusion, and sustainable development. International initiatives such as *Education for All* (EFA) and *Sustainable Development Goal 4* (SDG 4) emphasize that quality education should be equitable, inclusive, and relevant to learners' cultural and social contexts (UNESCO, 2015). These global frameworks recognize that meaningful learning occurs when school education is connected to learners' lived experiences, local environments, and community knowledge. Consequently, many countries have sought to incorporate local and Indigenous knowledge, community participation, cultural heritage, and linguistic diversity into curriculum

development to make education more responsive to local realities while preparing learners for participation in an increasingly interconnected world.

Within this context, local and Indigenous knowledge are increasingly recognized as valuable educational resources rather than as peripheral to formal schooling. UNESCO (2017) argues that integrating local and Indigenous knowledge into education contributes to cultural sustainability, environmental stewardship, and social justice. Local knowledge encompasses the beliefs, practices, languages, skills, and cultural traditions that communities develop through long-term interaction with their social and ecological environments. Incorporating such knowledge into school curricula strengthens learners' cultural identity while bridging the gap between academic learning and everyday life. Likewise, mother tongue-based multilingual education has been widely promoted because children learn more effectively when instruction begins in their first language before gradually expanding to additional languages (UNESCO, 2003). Particularly in multilingual societies, the use of local languages in education enhances learning outcomes while promoting linguistic diversity and cultural inclusion.

Despite these global commitments, educational reforms in many countries have been strongly influenced by globalization and international development agendas. Nepal is no exception to this trend. Scholars have argued that globalization, international development agencies, and donor-supported reform initiatives have significantly shaped Nepal's educational policies over the past several decades (Aryal, 2023; Rana et al., 2020; Regmi, 2021). These reforms have promoted standardized curricula, competency-based education, and global citizenship as key educational priorities (Shah & Brett, 2021). Although they have expanded access to modern knowledge and global competencies, they have also raised concerns about the limited representation of local and Indigenous knowledge systems, community histories, cultural practices, and local languages within formal education.

Scholars have consistently emphasized that teaching and learning should be grounded in students' cultural, linguistic, and community contexts to promote meaningful and equitable educational experiences, particularly for learners from marginalized communities (Banks, 2006; Banks & Banks, 2010; Freire, 1970/2005; Dhungana, 2020). However, Nepal's school curriculum has historically been influenced by externally driven educational models that inadequately reflect the country's rich cultural and linguistic diversity. Similarly, Poudel et al. (2022) argue that curriculum decolonization requires educational policies that recognize Indigenous languages and the knowledge embedded within them. Aswani et al. (2018) further contend that excluding local ecological and cultural knowledge from formal education weakens the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous knowledge and diminishes opportunities for communities to preserve their cultural heritage through schooling.

These concerns are particularly significant in Nepal, one of the world's most culturally and linguistically diverse countries. According to the National Population and Housing Census 2021, Nepal is home to 142 caste and ethnic groups and 124 mother tongues (National Statistics Office [NSO], 2023). This diversity presents both opportunities and challenges for developing a curriculum that reflects multiple cultures, languages, and knowledge systems. Joshi (2022), Joshi et al. (2022), and Joshi and James (2022) argue that educational equity requires meaningful recognition of minority languages and marginalized communities in both

educational policy and classroom practice. Likewise, Shahi (2022) highlights the important role of community schools in promoting inclusive education through equitable access and strengthened teacher capacity.

Nepal's transition to a federal system marked a significant shift in educational governance by granting local governments constitutional authority to participate in educational planning and curriculum development under the Constitution of Nepal (2015). This authority was further institutionalized through the *National Curriculum Framework* (2019), which established the local curriculum as a compulsory component of basic education. The primary objective of the local curriculum is to contextualize school education by incorporating local history, geography, culture, Indigenous knowledge, languages, occupations, biodiversity, and community resources into classroom teaching (Wagle, 2021). Although the concept of a local curriculum predates federalization, earlier curriculum frameworks provided only limited opportunities for locally developed content (Subedi, 2018). Federal restructuring significantly strengthened this approach by assigning local governments formal responsibility for curriculum development and implementation.

Although the local curriculum has become an important educational reform in Nepal, empirical evidence on its classroom implementation remains limited. Existing studies have primarily examined educational decentralization, multilingual education, curriculum reform, and policy implementation. Comparatively little attention has been paid to how local and Indigenous knowledge is translated into classroom practice within multicultural school settings. Moreover, few qualitative studies have explored teachers' preparedness, classroom pedagogy, cultural inclusion, students' participation, and the representation of minority communities during the implementation of municipality-developed local curricula. Addressing these gaps, the present study examines how the Bhajani Municipality local curriculum is implemented in practice and how effectively it promotes the integration of local and Indigenous knowledge in a culturally diverse school context.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on local curriculum implementation, culturally responsive pedagogy, and Indigenous knowledge integration in Nepal. By providing qualitative evidence from a municipality-developed curriculum implemented in a multicultural community school, the study offers practical insights for local governments, curriculum developers, teacher educators, and policymakers seeking to strengthen inclusive and contextually relevant education within Nepal's federal education system.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the implementation of the municipality-developed local curriculum in a multicultural school setting. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it facilitates an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices within their natural educational context. The study was conducted at Mahunyal Secondary School, Bhajani Municipality, Kailali District, Nepal. The school was purposively selected because it is recognized as a model community school and has implemented the municipality-developed local curriculum, *Bhajani Ko Paribesh*. Although Bhajani Municipality has a predominantly Tharu population, the

school enrolls students from diverse ethnic and cultural communities, including Tharu, Pahadi, Raji, Muslim, and Magar, making it an appropriate site for examining the implementation of the local curriculum in a multicultural context.

Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the development and implementation of the local curriculum. The participants comprised four teachers, two school administrative personnel, two members of the local curriculum development committee, and four students. This diverse group of participants provided multiple perspectives on curriculum development, classroom implementation, and students' learning experiences. Data were collected through classroom observations, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations were conducted to examine teaching practices, classroom interaction, and students' participation during local curriculum lessons. In addition, the researcher undertook participant observation by teaching a Grade Six to Eight local curriculum class, which provided firsthand insights into classroom dynamics, student engagement, and the practical challenges of implementing the curriculum. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, the head teacher, and the curriculum expert to explore their perceptions of the objectives, relevance, implementation practices, assessment, and challenges of the local curriculum. Particular attention was given to understanding teachers' beliefs regarding the role of local knowledge in education and their perspectives on balancing indigenous knowledge with English language proficiency, information and communication technology (ICT), and other global competencies. The local curriculum document, *Bhajani Ko Paribesh*, was also analyzed to examine its objectives, thematic content, and intended learning outcomes.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and curriculum documents were read repeatedly to gain familiarity with the data, after which meaningful codes were generated and organized into broader themes. The analysis focused on curriculum implementation, teacher preparedness, teachers' beliefs, assessment practices, cultural inclusion, and students' participation in learning local knowledge. Data from multiple sources were triangulated to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the administration of Mahunyal Secondary School and Bhajani Municipality before data collection commenced. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and verbal informed consent was obtained prior to their participation. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. To protect participants' privacy, no individual names or personally identifiable information are reported in this manuscript.

Because the researcher is also a Secondary Level Social Studies teacher at Mahunyal Secondary School, particular attention was given to maintaining ethical standards and minimizing potential researcher bias. The researcher adopted a reflexive approach throughout the study by maintaining reflective field notes, critically examining personal assumptions, and

separating the roles of teacher and researcher during data collection and analysis. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data were triangulated across classroom observations, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Care was also taken to ensure that participants' responses, students' classroom participation, and academic performance were not influenced by the research process or the researcher's professional relationship with the school.

Results and Discussion

Local Curriculum as a Reflection of Community Knowledge and Governance

The findings indicate that Bhajani Municipality has developed and implemented a municipality-based local curriculum entitled *Bhajani Ko Paribesh* for students at the basic education level (Grades 6–8). According to the participants, the curriculum was developed through a participatory process involving local stakeholders, including education officers, subject experts, retired teachers, head teachers, and technical personnel from the Municipal Education Unit. A six-member curriculum development committee was established to coordinate the process, comprising an education officer, a subject expert, two retired teachers, one head teacher, and one technical assistant. This collaborative approach reflects the municipality's effort to decentralize curriculum development and incorporate local expertise into educational planning.

Participants emphasized that the curriculum represents a significant shift from a centrally prescribed curriculum towards one that reflects local realities, community priorities, and local and Indigenous knowledge systems. Rather than functioning as an additional subject detached from students' everyday lives, *Bhajani Ko Paribesh* seeks to connect formal schooling with the social, cultural, environmental, and economic contexts of the municipality. This finding suggests that the curriculum serves not only as an educational document but also as a mechanism for preserving local identity and strengthening the relationship between schools and their communities.

Document analysis showed that the curriculum is organized into eight thematic chapters that introduce students to different dimensions of their locality. The first chapter familiarizes learners with the municipality's historical background, geographical features, administrative structure, ward offices, municipal planning processes, judicial committees, executive functions, and local governance mechanisms. Participants noted that this content helps students understand local governance and encourages civic awareness by connecting classroom learning with the institutions that influence their daily lives.

The second chapter focuses on local languages, culture, and arts, highlighting the preservation and promotion of the municipality's cultural diversity. By incorporating local languages and cultural traditions into classroom learning, the curriculum recognizes forms of knowledge that have historically received limited attention in the national curriculum. Participants believed that this strengthens students' cultural identity while acknowledging the multilingual and multicultural character of the municipality.

The third chapter addresses traditional occupations, local enterprises, trade, and Indigenous technologies. Teachers explained that this section introduces students to local economic activities, particularly agriculture and other traditional occupations practiced within the municipality. Such content encourages students to appreciate local livelihoods and recognize the economic potential of their own communities, thereby strengthening the connection between education and local development.

Environmental education constitutes another major component of the curriculum. The chapter entitled *Hamro Serophero* (Our Surroundings) includes topics such as local ecosystems, eco-gardens, community forests, kitchen gardening, eco-tourism, green schools, and environmental conservation. Teachers reported that these topics encourage students to engage with environmental issues that are directly observable in their communities, enabling them to relate scientific concepts to everyday experiences.

Similarly, the curriculum includes chapters on local tourism, industries, disaster risk management, health education, and traditional games and sports. Participants considered these themes particularly relevant because they address local opportunities and challenges while promoting practical knowledge and community participation. Disaster preparedness, for example, was viewed as especially important given the environmental vulnerabilities of the municipality.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that *Bhajani Ko Paribesh* represents a comprehensive effort to contextualize school education by integrating local governance, culture, environment, health, economy, and community heritage into classroom learning. These findings support the view that localized curricula enhance the relevance of education by connecting learning with students' lived experiences and community realities (Priestley & Minty, 2013). Likewise, they align with the principles of culturally responsive and place-based education, which emphasize that meaningful learning occurs when schools recognize and utilize local knowledge, culture, and community resources as integral components of the curriculum (Banks, 2006). The findings therefore suggest that the Bhajani Municipality curriculum extends beyond cultural preservation by providing opportunities for students to develop civic awareness, cultural identity, and a stronger sense of belonging within their local community.

Teacher Preparedness and Pedagogical Challenges

One of the most significant findings of this study is the limited preparedness of teachers to implement the local curriculum effectively. Most participants reported that they had received little or no professional orientation regarding the objectives, content, pedagogical approaches, or assessment strategies of the local curriculum. In addition, no comprehensive teacher guidebook or instructional manual had been developed to support classroom teaching. Consequently, teachers relied largely on their personal knowledge, prior teaching experience, and individual interpretations when delivering the subject.

Teachers further explained that several topics in *Bhajani Ko Paribesh* overlap with content already taught in Social Studies and Science. As a result, they found it difficult to design innovative and context-specific learning activities that distinguished the local curriculum from other subjects. While implementation appeared to be relatively more effective in the primary

grades, teachers responsible for Grades 6–8 reported greater challenges because of limited pedagogical guidance, inadequate instructional materials, and insufficient institutional support.

The findings suggest that curriculum reform alone is insufficient to improve classroom practice unless it is accompanied by systematic teacher preparation and continuous professional development. Although the municipality successfully developed a locally relevant curriculum, limited investment in teacher capacity constrained its effective implementation. Without adequate training and instructional support, teachers experienced uncertainty in selecting appropriate teaching methods, contextualizing learning activities, and assessing students' learning outcomes.

These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing that teachers play a central role in translating curriculum policy into classroom practice. Curriculum implementation depends not only on the quality of curriculum documents but also on teachers' professional knowledge, pedagogical competence, and confidence in delivering new content (Biesta et al., 2015). Similarly, Wagle (2021) reported that the implementation of Nepal's local curriculum has been hindered by insufficient teacher preparation and weak institutional support. The present study reinforces these findings by demonstrating that teachers require continuous professional development, practical teaching resources, and ongoing mentoring to implement municipality-developed curricula effectively.

Overall, the findings indicate that strengthening teacher preparedness should be regarded as a priority for improving local curriculum implementation. Professional development programmes, teacher guidebooks, classroom resource materials, and regular pedagogical support from local governments would enable teachers to integrate local and Indigenous knowledge more confidently and effectively into classroom teaching.

Misalignment between Curriculum and Assessment

The study identified significant inconsistencies between curriculum implementation and assessment practices. Although teachers attempted to follow the prescribed local curriculum, they reported that assessment practices were not adequately aligned with the intended learning outcomes. Several participants explained that examination questions were often broad and insufficiently connected to the contextualized content of *Bhajani Ko Paribesh*, creating uncertainty regarding instructional priorities and assessment expectations.

One teacher (T2) explained:

"It is difficult for us to teach this subject effectively because we have not received any orientation or teacher guidebook from the concerned authorities. There are four sections in Grade 8, and different teachers teach each section using their own methods. As a result, there is no consistency in teaching or assessment."

Students expressed similar concerns regarding the availability of learning resources and consistency in classroom instruction. One student (S1) stated:

"We do not have sufficient study materials for this subject. Some chapters are not fully explained in class, so we have to study on our own or refer to textbooks from other subjects."

For example, we learned about organic compost from the Science textbook because we did not have enough materials for the local curriculum."

Another student (S3) commented:

"Different teachers provide different notes for the same subject. We would like all teachers to follow the same materials so that we can prepare fairly for the examinations."

These findings indicate that the absence of standardized instructional materials, teacher orientation, and assessment guidelines has resulted in considerable variation in classroom teaching across different sections of the same grade. Consequently, students receive unequal learning experiences and face uncertainty when preparing for examinations. Such inconsistencies undermine the fairness and reliability of assessment while reducing teachers' confidence in implementing the curriculum effectively.

The findings further suggest that effective curriculum implementation depends on the constructive alignment of curriculum objectives, classroom instruction, learning resources, and assessment practices. When examinations fail to reflect the intended learning outcomes of a locally contextualized curriculum, teachers are more likely to emphasize examination preparation than experiential and community-based learning. This weakens the curriculum's ability to achieve its broader goals of promoting local knowledge, cultural understanding, and contextualized learning.

These findings are consistent with curriculum implementation research, which emphasizes that meaningful educational reform requires coherence among curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment. Misalignment between these components reduces the effectiveness of curriculum innovation and creates challenges for both teachers and learners. Therefore, local governments and educational authorities should develop clear assessment frameworks, standardized instructional materials, and teacher guidelines that align assessment practices with the objectives of the local curriculum. Such measures would promote consistency in teaching, enhance assessment fairness, and strengthen the overall quality of local curriculum implementation.

Unequal Participation in Learning Local Knowledge

Classroom observations revealed noticeable differences in students' participation during lessons related to local knowledge and cultural learning. The observed classroom included students from the Tharu, Pahadi, Raji, Muslim, and Magar communities. Students from the Tharu and Pahadi communities participated actively in classroom discussions and confidently shared examples from their cultural traditions, festivals, occupations, and everyday experiences. In contrast, students from minority communities, particularly the Raji, Muslim, and Magar groups, participated less frequently and appeared hesitant to express their cultural knowledge and personal experiences.

Both classroom observations and focus group discussions indicated that language barriers, limited self-confidence, and minority status within the classroom contributed to this unequal participation. Teachers and students acknowledged that minority students often hesitated to share their cultural experiences because their languages, traditions, and practices were seldom

represented in classroom discussions. Consequently, valuable local and Indigenous knowledge possessed by these communities remained largely invisible within the teaching–learning process.

One teacher (T1) reflected on this challenge:

"We also face difficulties in understanding the diverse cultures of this area. Since I am not from this community, I have limited knowledge of local traditions. Although I was assigned to teach the subject, I did not receive adequate orientation or training."

This statement demonstrates that successful implementation of the local curriculum depends not only on curriculum documents but also on teachers' cultural competence and familiarity with the communities represented in their classrooms. Without adequate preparation, teachers may unintentionally emphasize the cultures with which they are more familiar while overlooking the knowledge and experiences of minority communities.

These findings can be interpreted through Bourdieu's (1986) concept of **cultural capital**. Schools often recognize and value the cultural knowledge, language, and practices of socially dominant groups while giving less attention to the cultural resources of marginalized communities. In this study, students from the Tharu and Pahadi communities possessed forms of cultural capital that were more readily acknowledged during classroom interaction. Conversely, students from minority communities had fewer opportunities to contribute their knowledge despite the inclusive intentions of the local curriculum.

The findings also support Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory, which emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs through social interaction grounded in learners' cultural experiences. The limited participation of minority students suggests that classroom practices did not sufficiently recognize their linguistic and cultural identities, thereby restricting opportunities for collaborative learning and knowledge construction.

Similarly, Banks' (2006) framework of multicultural education argues that educational equity requires meaningful representation of all cultural groups in curriculum content, teaching practices, and classroom interactions. Although the local curriculum was developed to preserve local culture and promote cultural diversity, its implementation remained uneven. The cultures and traditions of larger communities received greater attention, whereas the knowledge and experiences of smaller communities, including the Raji, Muslim, and Magar, were less visible during classroom teaching.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that incorporating local content into curriculum documents alone is insufficient to achieve inclusive education. Meaningful integration of local and Indigenous knowledge requires culturally responsive pedagogy, teachers who are familiar with the cultural diversity of their communities, and classroom environments that encourage equitable participation by students from all cultural backgrounds. Without these conditions, curriculum reform may unintentionally reproduce existing social and cultural inequalities rather than reduce them.

Teachers' Beliefs and Curriculum Implementation

The study further revealed that teachers' professional beliefs significantly influenced the implementation of the local curriculum. Although participants generally acknowledged the importance of preserving local culture and Indigenous knowledge, they expressed differing views regarding the educational value and practical relevance of the curriculum. While some teachers regarded the local curriculum as an effective means of strengthening cultural identity and community engagement, others considered it less relevant than subjects that promote English language proficiency, information and communication technology (ICT), and other global competencies.

One teacher (T1) expressed this concern:

"Youth are migrating to foreign countries for employment. Therefore, education should focus more on English language skills, information technology, and global competencies than on local history and culture."

This perspective reflects the growing influence of globalization on teachers' educational priorities. In communities where labour migration is common, teachers often perceive English language proficiency, digital literacy, and technological skills as essential for improving students' future employment opportunities. Consequently, some teachers viewed the local curriculum as having limited practical value compared with subjects that they believed better prepare students for national and international labour markets.

However, interviews with members of the curriculum development committee suggested that these perceptions were influenced not only by teachers' personal beliefs but also by limited professional orientation. Participants explained that although head teachers were involved in the curriculum development process, many classroom teachers received little or no formal training on the curriculum's objectives, content, or pedagogical approaches. As a result, several teachers lacked a clear understanding of how local and Indigenous knowledge could complement, rather than compete with, the development of global competencies.

An administrative participant (AP1) similarly acknowledged that teachers held differing perspectives regarding the value of the local curriculum. While emphasizing the importance of preserving local culture and Indigenous knowledge, the participant also recognized that students require life skills, digital literacy, and global competencies to respond effectively to contemporary social and economic challenges. According to the participant, these competencies are currently promoted through both curricular and extracurricular activities; however, stronger integration within classroom teaching remains necessary.

These findings reveal an important conflict between local relevance and global competitiveness in contemporary education. Rather than viewing these priorities as mutually exclusive, the findings suggest that local curricula should integrate local and Indigenous knowledge with twenty-first-century skills, including digital literacy, critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving. Such an approach would enable students to preserve their cultural identity while simultaneously developing the competencies required for higher education, employment, and active participation in an increasingly interconnected world.

The findings are consistent with the concept of **teacher agency** proposed by Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson (2015), which argues that curriculum implementation is shaped not only by official curriculum documents but also by teachers' professional beliefs, experiences, and educational philosophies. Teachers actively interpret, adapt, and prioritize curriculum according to their understanding of the purposes of education. In the context of Bhajani Municipality, teachers working in communities characterized by high rates of labour migration often interpreted educational success primarily in terms of global employment opportunities, influencing the way they viewed the relevance of the local curriculum.

Overall, the findings suggest that strengthening local curriculum implementation requires more than the distribution of curriculum documents. Teachers need sustained professional development, opportunities for critical reflection, and ongoing dialogue regarding the educational value of local and Indigenous knowledge. Such initiatives can help teachers recognize that contextualized learning and global competencies are complementary rather than competing educational goals, thereby promoting a more balanced and inclusive approach to curriculum implementation.

Local Curriculum as a Tool for Social Cohesion

Classroom observations revealed that students tended to interact more frequently with peers from their own cultural communities during learning activities related to the local curriculum. Although the classroom was culturally diverse, opportunities for meaningful interaction among students from different cultural backgrounds were limited. On the behalf of study one student S4 explained.

"...we could not understand the language of the Raji people, we rarely mixed or spent time with them."

This pattern suggests that cultural diversity within a classroom does not automatically promote intercultural understanding or social cohesion. Teachers acknowledged that the local curriculum has considerable potential to strengthen relationships among students from different communities by encouraging them to learn about one another's histories, languages, cultural traditions, and everyday experiences. Participants emphasized that the role of the teacher is crucial in creating an inclusive learning environment that fosters collaboration and the sharing of ideas. To achieve this, they noted that teachers must be well-trained in multicultural education, enabling them to intentionally encourage students from diverse backgrounds to open up, share their perspectives, and engage in meaningful dialogue.

The findings suggest that culturally responsive pedagogy plays a crucial role in transforming the local curriculum into a meaningful tool for social cohesion. When teachers create inclusive classroom environments that recognize and value the knowledge, languages, and experiences of all cultural communities, students are more likely to develop mutual understanding, empathy, and respect for cultural diversity. Conversely, when classroom activities primarily reflect the experiences of dominant communities, opportunities for intercultural learning become limited, and existing social and cultural inequalities may be reinforced.

These findings are consistent with Banks' (2006) multicultural education framework, which argues that educational equity requires not only diverse curriculum content but also inclusive teaching practices and equitable classroom participation. Similarly, culturally responsive education emphasizes that schools should foster democratic values, intercultural dialogue, and respect for diversity by creating learning environments in which every student's cultural background is recognized as a valuable educational resource.

Overall, the findings indicate that the local curriculum has the potential to contribute to social cohesion by strengthening intercultural understanding and promoting inclusive participation. However, achieving this objective requires more than the inclusion of local cultural content in curriculum documents. It also depends on teachers' pedagogical competence, culturally responsive classroom practices, and deliberate efforts to create opportunities for meaningful interaction among students from different cultural communities. In this way, the local curriculum can serve not only as a means of preserving local culture but also as a foundation for building an inclusive, democratic, and socially cohesive learning community.

Researcher Reflexivity

As both the researcher and a Secondary Level Social Studies teacher at Mahunyal Secondary School, I occupied a dual role throughout this study. This position provided valuable opportunities to gain an in-depth understanding of classroom practices, teachers' experiences, and students' engagement with the municipality-developed local curriculum. At the same time, it required continuous critical reflection to minimize the potential influence of my professional role on the research process and the interpretation of findings.

The development of *Bhajani Ko Paribesh* represents a significant initiative by Bhajani Municipality to implement the constitutional provisions on educational decentralization and the *National Curriculum Framework* (2019). However, my experience as both a teacher and researcher revealed that curriculum development alone is insufficient to achieve meaningful educational change. Effective implementation requires adequate teacher preparation, institutional support, instructional resources, and continuous monitoring.

One of the major issues observed during the study was the limited involvement of classroom teachers in the curriculum development process. Although the municipality organized consultation meetings involving head teachers and members of the curriculum development committee, many teachers who were ultimately responsible for classroom implementation had little opportunity to contribute to curriculum design. This limited participation appeared to reduce teachers' sense of ownership and their understanding of the curriculum's objectives.

I also observed considerable implementation challenges during the first year of implementation (2080 BS). The curriculum was introduced before essential teaching and learning resources were available. Students were required to sit for examinations despite the absence of officially published textbooks, teacher guidebooks, and adequate instructional materials. Consequently, classroom instruction varied across teachers, and many students experienced difficulties in preparing for the Basic Level Examination.

During the following academic year, textbooks and supplementary learning materials became available, and schools were instructed to implement the curriculum according to the prescribed guidelines. Nevertheless, another challenge emerged regarding teacher assignment. Rather than assigning teachers with appropriate expertise, schools frequently allocated the subject to teachers from different disciplinary backgrounds, including Nepali, English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Most of these teachers had not received formal orientation or professional training related to the local curriculum. During the study period, I also taught several local curriculum classes in Grades 6–8 alongside my regular teaching responsibilities, enabling me to observe implementation challenges directly.

These experiences highlighted that teaching a separate local curriculum subject within limited instructional time presents practical difficulties. Although the curriculum successfully introduces students to local history, culture, governance, environmental issues, and Indigenous knowledge, it is difficult to represent the full cultural diversity of Bhajani Municipality within a single subject. Based on these observations, I believe that integrating local and Indigenous knowledge across existing school subjects may provide a more sustainable and educationally meaningful approach than treating it as an independent subject. Such integration would also create greater opportunities for experiential learning and interdisciplinary teaching.

Throughout the research process, I maintained reflective field notes, critically examined my own assumptions, and triangulated evidence from classroom observations, participant observation, interviews, and document analysis to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. These reflexive practices helped reduce potential researcher bias and strengthened the transparency and rigor of the study.

Overall, my dual role as teacher and researcher enabled a deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges associated with implementing a municipality-developed local curriculum. At the same time, it reinforced the importance of reflexivity, ethical awareness, and methodological rigor in qualitative educational research.

Conclusion

This study examined the implementation of the municipality-developed local curriculum, *Bhajani Ko Paribesh*, at Mahunyal Secondary School in Bhajani Municipality, Kailali, with a particular focus on the integration of local and Indigenous knowledge within a multicultural educational context. The findings demonstrate that the local curriculum represents an important step toward contextualizing school education by incorporating local history, culture, languages, governance, environmental knowledge, traditional occupations, and community resources into classroom learning. In this respect, the curriculum reflects the broader objectives of Nepal's federal education system to decentralize curriculum development and strengthen the relationship between schools and local communities.

Despite these achievements, the study found that the effective implementation of the curriculum remains constrained by several interrelated challenges. These include inadequate teacher preparation, the absence of teacher guidebooks and instructional resources, inconsistencies between curriculum objectives and assessment practices, and the limited representation of minority communities within classroom teaching. Classroom observations

further revealed that students from dominant cultural groups participated more actively than those from minority communities, indicating that the inclusion of local content alone does not automatically ensure culturally inclusive classroom practices.

The study also highlights that teachers' professional beliefs significantly influence curriculum implementation. While many teachers recognized the importance of preserving local and Indigenous knowledge, others emphasized English language proficiency, digital literacy, and global competencies as higher educational priorities. These differing perspectives illustrate the continuing conflict between globalization and contextualized education in Nepal. Rather than viewing these priorities as competing goals, the findings suggest that local and Indigenous knowledge should be integrated with twenty-first-century competencies to provide students with both cultural rootedness and the knowledge and skills required in a rapidly changing world.

The findings contribute to the growing literature on local curriculum implementation by providing empirical evidence from classroom observations, interviews, and participant observation within a municipality-developed curriculum. They demonstrate that successful curriculum reform depends not only on curriculum design but also on teachers' professional capacity, culturally responsive pedagogy, equitable classroom participation, and sustained institutional support.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that local governments provide regular teacher training, develop comprehensive teacher guidebooks and instructional materials, establish assessment systems aligned with curriculum objectives, and ensure that local curricula represent the cultural diversity of all communities within the municipality. Greater participation of classroom teachers, community members, and representatives of minority groups in curriculum development and periodic curriculum review would further strengthen the relevance, inclusiveness, and sustainability of local curriculum implementation.

This study was limited to a single community school in Bhajani Municipality and focused on Grades 6–8. Therefore, the findings should not be generalized to all municipalities in Nepal. Future research could adopt comparative case studies across different local governments, include multiple schools representing diverse geographical and cultural contexts, and employ mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to examine the long-term impact of local curriculum implementation on students' learning, cultural identity, and educational outcomes.

Overall, the study concludes that the meaningful integration of local and Indigenous knowledge into school education requires more than the introduction of a local curriculum. It requires well-prepared teachers, culturally responsive pedagogical practices, inclusive representation of diverse communities, and continuous collaboration among schools, local governments, curriculum developers, and community stakeholders. Strengthening these dimensions will enhance the quality, relevance, and inclusiveness of education within Nepal's federal education system while preserving the rich cultural heritage and knowledge systems of local communities.

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