A Dialogue between Curriculum Development and Postmodern Perspectives: A Context of Local Knowledge

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Abstract

This article provides insights into curriculum development from a postmodern perspective on the sustainability and usability of local or indigenous knowledge systems. This paper examines the western thoughts that potentially affect local and indigenous knowledge by analyzing interviews with scholars involved in higher education and explores how western thoughts affect the existing Nepalese school curriculum. Although western thought permeates and pervades our educational practices, the benefits go to them implicitly by subordinating us. There is an argument in the article that postmodern ideas have originated in the womb of western understanding; the ideas in this article are argued to be adaptable to our curriculum development. The rationale behind it is that our current curriculum thinking, from Tayler to Hlynka and Yeaman's outline of key postmodern thinking, ignores the indigenous nature of knowledge systems, largely othering them as subordinate knowledge. It explores that the developed curriculum should represent unheard voices, ignored realities, and the histories and experiences of underrepresented groups. The authors conclude by suggesting that policies, plans, and programs should be adapted to reflect the underrepresented and unheard voices of the society.

Keywords: curriculum, local knowledge, modernity, postmodernity, western thought

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Introduction

Eastern education systems have been strongly influenced by western knowledge systems, making it difficult to decontextualize and deconstruct ongoing educational and developmental patterns (Breidlid, 2013). In Nepal, western knowledge systems are highly embraced, ignoring grassroots realities by separating the people's experiences following under the trap of neocolonial global agenda of advanced countries (Wagle, et al, 2019). Pertaining to school education and its curricula, we love to hire western paradigms and strategies such as school curriculum, community-based curriculum, and local curriculum to educate our children. Even though these curriculum models are seemingly sound in portraying the local realities and knowledge system, these strategies are based on neoliberal ideology (Chopra, 2010), which intends to create temptation in public as a very embracing matter and the public pursues without interrogating such strategies. Despite the realities of these different strategic conceptions of the curriculum, few discussions have been carried out in academic space and their ongoing practices at the local level (Bhattarai & Khatri, 2012). As a result, many local groups, ethnicities, genders, languages, ecology, and natural resources have been overlooked in Nepali education programs - content, pedagogy, and learning materials.

Modernist cultural frames reproduce "relations of dominance, subordination, and inequality," (Boboc, p.143). The Nepali education system wittingly or unwittingly excludes the spirit of the local knowledge system in the curriculum development process, because as Wagle et al (2019, p. 36) argue, "the tacit implication herein that the common curriculum standards work well throughout the country". Curriculum decision-making processes must go against the product of modernity development models that perceive a fixed and rational approach to the process of curriculum development. Thus, owing to the practice of the dominant mainstream education system primarily based on western thought and ideology, Nepali education and its apparatus have been producing and reproducing western epistemology and devaluating the originality and ownness of the local or indigenous knowledge system.

Against the context of the westernization of the Nepali education system, this article aims to explore the relationship beneficial to fostering Nepali local/indigenous knowledge systems, and minimizing the effects of western knowledge dominance in curriculum development. In the current school curriculum, the knowledge system is compartmentalized and commodified, a challenge to preserving Nepali wisdom and knowledge systems' traditionality and originality. Although postmodern thought is also a western concept, it encompasses some of the ideas, subtle but socially ignored needs and issues, better than any other methods practiced for curriculum development. Therefore, we examine a dialogue between how postmodern perspectives interact with indigenous and local knowledge in school level curriculum development process in Nepal.

Theoretical Underpinning: Modernity and Post-modernity

Modernism is the result of a long history of Cartesian-Newtonian epistemologies that ranked other epistemologies as the "Othering" (Breidlid, 2013; Said, 2003). During the modern era, everything tagged as "logocentrism" (Pada, 2007, p. 32), a center-seeking tendency, or grand

narrative is viewed as the culmination of the enlightenment (Boboc, 2012). Most countries run their curriculum projects and education systems tentatively based on western hegemonic knowledge, which greatly influences and derails the country's needs (Breildlid, 2013). Therefore, western epistemology is claimed to have operated across the globe in different forms and practices. According to Tucker, as cited in Breidlid (2013, p. 15), "Under the rubric of westernization or Europeanization gained the status of a universal goal and destiny" is a manifestation of western epistemic hegemony, a form of capitalism, over knowledge and power in developing countries.

Clinescu (1987) views modernity as bourgeois, characterized by progress spurred by technological advancements, as a commodity under auspicious times. Third-world countries have been extremely pressured to perceive and treat education as a product for market consumption due to aggressive expansion and the nature of capitalism. As a result of the Washington Consensus, a liberal democratic and neoliberal ideology, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund are accelerating their ideas about education as a commodity consumption and its market expansion (Olaniran & Agnello, 2008; Griffith, 2006). In this case, Nepal is not an exception to accepting such principles.

In contrast, we have observed that various regional and international organizations, such as the World Bank, the department of International Development-DFID, etc., are working with ideologies that appear to be more humanitarian explicitly (Griffith, 2006). It seems that they purpose and launch different programs with this humanitarian mask, including pro-poor initiatives, empowerment of indigenous and ethnic communities, quality improvement of primary education, etc. The effects of modernism can therefore be seen in rural life, in migration to urban life, in unemployment and corruption, in privatization and monopoly (Griffith, 2006; Boboc, 2012: Breidlid, 2013). This is, therefore, how modernism has ignored grassroots realities, manipulated the state system for its own advantage, and privatized the school system and higher education by influencing state policies and programs.

From this standpoint, the authors argue that neoliberalism underpins western hegemony, which leads to inequalities in distributing resources and capital across the globe (Breidlid, 2013; Olaniran & Agnello, 2008; Griffith, 2006;). Thus, postmodernists assume that all the aspects of modernism, such as the totalizing concept, great narrative argument, utilitarian mentality, and objective rationality, are modernist premises. The emergence of post-modernism, therefore, is a reaction to the totalizing concept, meta-narrative argument, centrality, utilitarian mindset, and objective rationality embedded in modernism.

On the contrary, post-modernism successfully attacks modernism on its centralistic characteristics by exposing invisible, ignored, and micro-social realities. It is considered an intellectual idea, movement, or scholarly debate opposing the central striving tendencies of modernism, originating from architecture and arts (Boboc, 2012; Koo Hok-chun, 2002). Historically, it appears that modernism has emerged from western hegemonic ideology, a form of capitalism, which governs most of today's world education system (Briedlid, 2013; Olaniran

& Agnello, 2008; Koo Hok-chun, 2002). Today's education ignores the grassroots realities of society due to modernity's reliance on western science and technology. In our knowledge system today, it is important to respect local realities by opposing, as Browne (2010) contend, the rationality, homogenizing patterns and unitary conceptions that govern modernity's assumptions. Postmodernism advocates for multiple realities to understand the social phenomenon, which can be seen as the demise of grand narratives and the inclination towards small narratives (Boboc, 2012), thus upholding our view of curriculum development.

Equally, western hegemonic epistemology is based on polarities between west and east, between oxidation and orientation, between civilized and uncivilized, and between logic and illogic (Said, 2003). To meet the vested and invisible intentions of modernity, this philosophical paradigm has been playing a chess of power, and dominance in developing countries, particularly in the global south, by their structures and patterns that inject us as a poison of dependency (Matunhu, 2011; Olaniran & Agnello, 2008).

The authors perceive that our education system is in peril – either we fail to perceive our own contextual needs and realities, or we pretend to be a good implementer of western ideology in our education system. This means, the current education system has failed to look back to our tradition and knowledge system, rather it welcomes an appropriation of our education system in line with the western knowledge system, thereby, it is likely to sweep away our traditionality and originality of education we have been practicing.

In this context, we tend to sensitize by this article to transcend our mindset of modernity and to think of the subtle alternations, if not varied views that nurture our originality, knowledge system, values, cultures, and indigeneity, within our whole education system. All the above-discussed issues raise questions in our mind about whose values and knowledge our education system loves and nurtures, whose values and knowledge our system instills in our children, and what sort of citizens our education is producing. These critical understandings, therefore, enable us to view the issues from a postmodern perspective, critiquing modernity as it is in existence.

Methods and Materials

To generate data from the field, this study uses a qualitative method, a phenomenological approach. An empirical basis for this paper comes from interviews conducted with university teachers teaching at the Faculty of Education in and outside of Kathmandu. As a phenomenological approach, we focused on the participants' perceptions and experiences and how they give meaning to their experiences (Creswell, 2012, Patton, 2002). Through this process, we summarized the participants' ideas, perceptions, experiences, worldviews, and the meaning they give to their perceptions, ideas, and experiences. Taking the ethics of qualitative research into consideration, we did not utilize any digital devices to record the interviews as per our consent with them; because we were conscious of the locality, anonymity, and privacy of the participants. Likewise, the interview was face to face, and the guidelines would encompass unstructured and flexible questions thinking that the interaction would be specific enough and problem-centered.

Our data analysis involves the thematic approach. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), thematic analysis begins with familiarizing oneself with data, creating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing and refining the themes, and producing a report. Following the data generation, we conducted a thematic analysis and produced the report in accordance with the stated objectivity and methodological premises. Therefore, meaning-making has been drawn by the combination of the conceptual understanding derived from the theoretical analysis and the empirical evidence collected from the interview.

Results and Discussion

The themes that emerged from the field data have been presented together with the discussion and argumentation connecting with underlying theories as follows.

Poor Focus on Local Knowledge and Wisdom of the Community

Local knowledge and wisdom are said to be ignored in the school curriculum, this means the school curriculum is less aware of what is available locally. It is a burgeoning issue that the curriculum, and pedagogy, if not education policy, is seemingly not free of western thought and ideology. In this regard, a participant argues:

In our school curriculum, we integrate content irrelevant to students' local knowledge, context, and understanding. In light of this, one may wonder what the future generation will be produced by such a school curriculum, and what happens if the new generation feels pressured to encounter complex societies they live in the future.

There is a disconnection between the existing school curriculum and students' lives, which reflects an implicit integration of western ideas into our education system. This is what, Breidlid (2013) emphasizes that this form of epistemology has deeply rooted in all paradigms of eastern society - education, development, culture, and religion – that can hardly be decontextualized and deconstructed as an alternative epistemology to education and development. This is a challenge for us to get rid of our education system from westernization, which ideologically devalues our local knowledges and wisdom in a manner that tends to assimilate our new generations into westerners' own spirit of value and culture.

Modern Education as a Symbol of Inequality

The form of modern education, if not a universal form of education, has been a means of inequality in society. As evidence, parents and communities are very positive about English schools and prioritize sending their children to English-medium schools, have created a huge discrepancy in the social class of people in Nepal. Equally, we are indulged in preferring to be a modernized one, for example, by extending our views in English and exhibiting pride to speak and understand English. The current schooling system of Nepal divides the society based on economic possession, as choosing of English school reflects this reality, what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) coin it as a social capital. Concerning this, a participant views:

Parents want their children to attend English-medium schools, so English is increasingly privileged by opening private schools. In the same manner, there have also been attempts by the government that many public schools tend to provide education in the medium of English language in order to attract students and parents to public schools. Owing to this, the knowledge system of many local groups – ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups, and the issues of ecology, and natural resources – have been overlooked at the expanse of importation of western knowledge in our education.

The excerpt exhibits how western knowledge systems are invisibly destroying our local wisdom and knowledge through a formal schooling system, and working with our education system to satisfy their own vested goals. This argument is consistent with Giroux's (1992) view, the rigid unalterable boundaries of the modernist cultural frame exclude categories such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity that result in the reproduction of "relations of domination, subordination, and inequality" (Cited in Boboc, p.143). Unquestionably, our education system may have many holes in its any corners, which allow anyone to make comments on it for improvement with local knowledge and wisdom embedded in our different communities.

Equally, the participants critique the current school curriculum development process Nepal is pursuing. Since curriculum development could be considered a product of modern development models with a fixed and rational approach, its design and organization are likely to work as a catalyst for exclusion. A participant views:

In Nepal, the impacts of modernism on education have been highly practiced, for example, a top-down approach, ignoring the grassroots, if not invisible realities of the society. This is, in fact, disconnecting the students having different social-cultural backgrounds from the realization of their own knowledges and wisdom. This top-down model has generated teachers and community as passive consumers and recognized education and its tool, such as curriculum and textbooks, from market-oriented perspectives.

The structure of the education system originated from a modernist perspective and is a form of centralization where power is shared from top to bottom approach. This form of approach, what Pada (2007) calls, is a centrally oriented approach or logocentrism, a central seeking tendency. The more we focus on centeredness the little concern we pay to the local needs, thus naturally excluding the subtle realities of societies. The current school-level curriculum follows the same approach, a handful of people at the central level plan, decide, design, and develop the education policy and program, curriculum, and pedagogy, and impose it to the lower level for implementation. This procedure, therefore, less represents the perceived needs of the local level, and just works on making local people and communities a passive consumer, as it denies their proper participation in such a process.

Increment of Donors and International Organizations

The post-1990's democratic movement wittingly or unwittingly welcomed international donors and organizations to education and also helped them increase their investment in

education in the name of support (Bhatt, 2011). With the involvement of international donors and organizations, education became/has become a vehicle for meeting their masked interests and priorities, and implicitly works as an impetus for the commercialization and privatization of educational institutions and programs. The role and the responsibility of the state for its civic have become curtailed through educational policies and programs. A participant asserts how it happens in our education system:

> The policy on increasing the privatization of public services in the financial support of the donors and international organizations in Nepal has curtailed the government's role in its responsibility for public service, and the state has acted as a rubber stamp in accordance with their intentions and motives.

This illuminates the roles and involvement of donors and international organizations in education. This is a clear picture of modernity, a neoliberal motive that works with globalization to sideline other epistemologies, a serious threat to collapsing our originality and diversities. Breidlid (2013) argues that while western hegemonic epistemology is perceived to be objective, depersonalized, and decontextualized, postmodernist epistemology is more relativist of nature, culturally embedded partially may bring to light the ignored knowledge and realities compared to other approaches.

This kind of practice in our education system is undoubtedly influenced by the neoliberal ideology accelerates globalization in the developing world(Matunhu, 2011; Olaniran & Agnello, 2008). Because of our immersion in such ideology, the bitter part is our failure to perceive our holistic identity, if not a specific identity of different social-cultural uniqueness. These different international organizations and donor agencies are a danger to our socio-cultural diversities and are always in danger of extinction. A participant views:

> This is obvious that we are welcoming international agencies and organizations from our involvements and commitments. For example, our membership (2003) with the World Trade Organization (WTO), and adaptation of a structural adjustment program of the International Monetary Fund-IMF and World Bank-WB, are working with our system for their own betterment.

This happened because we sought economic efficiency and sustainability by welcoming an open market policy, an importation of cultural hegemony and values to our system. Despite some benefits, in Griffith's (2006) understanding, this hegemony evolves into a new form of neoliberalism, if not neocolonialism, that could work on devastating our local knowledge and wisdom. We want to illuminate with evidence that, even though this data is a bit older, it gives a signal that we are losing everything because of adopting an open market policy. Nepal adopted the structural adjustment program (SAP) in 1986, and since then, as a result, tariffs have dropped to 14 percent on average; 10 percent in agriculture; and foreign exchange restrictions have been increased (Razzaque & Raihan, 2008). Moreover, they with the SAP implementation, Nepal's exports have hardly grown (Razzaque & Raihan, 2008), indicating that our overall national and local conditions are deteriorating. With the increment of privatization and commercialization of

education, we can see a widening gap between the rich and poor in our education system. In this perception, developing a curriculum from a post-modern perspective is partly useful for screening their devastating effects and bringing to light traditional knowledge systems, practices, and livelihoods for national strength. A participant illuminates how we could tackle modernity and globalization.

It is not meant that we should not update ourselves to reflect the ever-changing world. Nor shouldn't we be modernized and updated with such an ever-changing context and time. For being a modernized one, a foundation is essential to be built on our mindset by strongly corresponding to our originality and context-based reality. However, we are very far from thinking of such a foundation for our socio-cultural uniqueness in order to survive our own knowledge system strongly owing to our insatiable desires and motives for becoming a modernized one.

These reveal the impacts of globalization together with the roles and involvement of donors and international organizations working in Nepal. A direct impact is homogenizing our local knowledge and culture, and our new generations tend to expose such homogenization through their everyday practices. However, the current challenge is not to impede our generation from reaping the fruits of globalization but to combat the unnecessary flow of international organizations in the name of education support. For being modern, it does not mean that we have to adopt the values and knowledges that westerners possess, rather we build a foundation strongly communicating our local knowledge systems. This all becomes possible through the education system that highly embraces local knowledge and wisdom, and this incredibly contributes to our ecological sustainability and our smartness over them.

Curriculum, Local Farming System, and Modernization

It is said that modernization is the basic to threatening our local livelihood practices, which survive life-sustaining and giving activities. One of the perils of modernization is to sweep away our agricultural farms, and damage local diversities, it is further exacerbated if our education system and its pedagogical practices including curriculum favor the modernity project of western societies (Breidlid, 2013). The dark side of our education system appears to be a bedfellow of western hegemonic knowledge that jeopardizes and contaminates our ethical, and moral system and disregards our traditionality. In this regard, a participant points out a deficiency in the school's curricula, and pedagogical practices since a decline in ethics and morality have been an overarching issue in our education system due to the modernity project.

The school curriculum, textbooks, and pedagogical practices do not promote knowledge practices based on sociocultural diversity. Nor have they passed on moral values and duties to children with due respect for cultural diversities and knowledge variations. Our higher education is experiencing a tremendous increase in disciplinary problems among students and teachers could be a side effect.

The excerpt implies an issue of moral education which is important but has been ignored largely in schools. The value of moral education is that it is part of a nation's living legacy (ASCD, 1998) and a social and cultural boundary that ties us together for nation-building. There may be a debate about whether morality and ethics are part of the formal education system, for it develops as children having different social-cultural differences get socialized in their culture and communities. Modernity prioritizing individualism is a great challenge as it reduces collectivity, cohesion, and brotherhood embedded in our different cultures and traditions. Therefore, our school system cannot ignore moral education because it is assumed to be one of the most important ethos to be included in the education system (ASCD, 1998)).

Education under the modernity project wrongly provides fuels to the degradation of local practices and products including the farming system embedded in our different social and cultural diversities. A participant expresses dissatisfaction with the failure of education to recognize good agricultural practices of different ethnic, indigenous, and cultural groups, nor has education acknowledged successful practices of peasants in the curriculum to encourage general farmers.

> Education has not been equally able to subsume the successful cases of peasants and farmers; nor has it well-equipped peasants with discouraging increased use of fertilization on the land through public education. The contents of the public interests, the local indigenous practices, and wisdom have been sidelined resulting in long-termed effects on our health and well-being.

This exhibits how effective the public education system for the protection and sustainability of local practices embedded in every ethnic and indigenous community is questionable. Because of modernity and globalization, we are today exposed to highly fertilized poisonous food, and is heading towards collapsing our various wisdom and fundamental entities of living and survival strategies which we got from our ancestors. This justifies a curriculum that addresses these burgeoning issues resulting from globalization and modernity by focusing on the perceived local realities, indigenous practices, and values (Breidlid, 2013; Koo Hok-chun, 2002) that orient us toward our ancestor's practices for survival. Our long-lasting survival depends on the local practices and livelihoods of our indigenous communities since they have typical knowledge systems and practices that strengthen and maintains the ecosystem (Breidlid, 2013) that always works with fueling to sustain us.

The Dilemma of Indigenous and Local Communities

Indigenous communities themselves are in dilemma and divided in self, regarding whether they go back to their cultures, values, and practices or leap forwards to embracing globalization and modernization. This argument raises a concern as to viewing this dilemma of ethnic and indigenous communities more seriously to save the diverse natural inhabitants, their resources, and their knowledge system. As argued by the participants:

> The increased tendencies of indigenous communities to become modern could threaten the uniqueness of the knowledge system embedded in such communities. However, it

does not mean that we should stop them from becoming modern; rather curriculum should be a base for them to sustain their original knowledge based on global dependence with local orientation.

The argument provides an insight to foster the original practices of our ethnic and indigenous communities together with their exposure to the global and modern community. We cannot argue that ethnic and indigenous communities should go back to embracing their culture, knowledge, and values by wholly giving up their participation in globalization and modernization. If we say so, this may mean that we again push them back to further marginalization, and do want them to be mainstreamed into society.

Equally, we cannot also say that they should entirely abandon their cultures, values, and livelihood practices to participate in the global and modern community. If we say so, it means our efforts and argumentations may convey an assimilative meaning and motive. To eliminate and address this dilemma, schools should have curricula and education programs that prepare them to counter the negative and homogenous effects of globalization and modernization for advantageous gains. Likewise, school curricula and programs are expected to instill empowering knowledge and skills sufficiently in them so that they can enable them to appreciate and embrace their traditions and cultures.

Conclusion and Reflection

A root cause of the problem in developing countries like Nepal is the western model of education, a form of the global model of education that is pervasive with the same format and structure around the world (Breidlid, 2013; Olaniran & Agnello, 2008). Based on the Cartesian-Newtonian approach to the economy, education, and politics, the hegemonic monoculture of Eurocentric epistemology has created a dependence on developing countries (Breidlid, 2013; Matunhu, 2011). From this understanding, Nepal is not an exception to it. Thus, other knowledges, local realities, and wisdom are in danger of extinction in Nepal.

The importation of the western knowledge system in our education gradually degrading the local knowledge system, a danger to swiping out our originality and local species. In the name of modernity, the increased commercialization and commodification of the education system have created a gap between the poor and rich and encouraged inequality in education. Since our education is dependent on international donors and organizations, we cannot progress unless we reduce them from the process, and unless we align our education system with local practices and diversities.

It is imperative to consider subtle realities, neglected practices, and masked hegemony of society; otherwise, the so-called equality, equity, and social justice as advocated in education are nothing more than gimmicks. To address such subtle realities and ignored knowledge and practices, a post-modern perspective on curriculum development is a seemingly adequate approach, as it rejects the meta-narratives and central seeking tendency in curriculum development. It thus requires the deconstruction of our current worldview on education so that

it can represent diverse needs and expectations locally, and address the inequality, injustices, and degradation of local natural resources and traditional farming system. Finally, if the curriculum is based on local needs and perceived expectations of different ethnic and indigenous communities, then it becomes a watershed in reducing the effects of the modernity project of education in Nepal. This education system, therefore, lays a stepping stone for all irrespective of their cultures, ethnicities, languages, genders, etc. to lead them to a productive life by being an interconnected and interdependent individual among diverse groups and communities.

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