

Role of Education System in Shaping Social Values in Nepal

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Abstract

This article examines the role of the education system in shaping social values in Nepal through documentary analysis. It reviews the historical development of Nepali education from the Panchayati regime to the present federal democratic republic and analyzes how shifting political ideologies have shaped educational goals, curricula, and value formation. It also discusses how critical pedagogy empower minorities challenging oppressive social values and practices. Findings indicate that the Panchayati education system centralized the socio-cultural values of the ruling elite class whereas post-1990 democratic reforms emphasized inclusiveness, diversity, human rights, and democratic values. National education policies, curriculum frameworks, and higher education programs increasingly foreground social values, civic consciousness, and life skills. The article concludes that integrating critical pedagogy within the Nepali education system can promote social justice, pluralism, and inclusive national development. Thus, this study attempts to expose the vital role of education system in the formation of social values and civic consciousness so that it helps to reform current education policies and practices.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy, curriculum, democratic values, education policy, social values

Introduction

Education is often taken as an effective tool for social transformation and value formation. Nelson Mandela said that education can be a powerful instrument to change the world (Ratcliffe, 2014). Education systems shape social norms, beliefs, values, and cultural identities, functioning as key sites for the construction of national integrity and social cohesion (Gellner, 2008). At the same time, scholars have argued that education often reproduces social inequalities by privileging the cultural capital and ideology of dominant social groups (Apple, 2004; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

In comparative contexts, education systems have been shown to promote particular ideological values, such as socialist values in Cuba (Bridges, 2020), centralized national culture in Myanmar (Lwin, 2019), and democratic, knowledge-based values in Finland (Sahlberg, 2007). However, scholarly literature on the role of education in shaping social values in Nepal remains limited. This article addresses this gap by analyzing how the Nepali education system has contributed to the formation and transformation of social values across different political periods.

The study aims to (a) examine the evolution of Nepali education from the Panchayati regime to the federal democratic republic, (b) analyze educational policies and curricula in relation to social value formation, and (c) discuss the relevance of critical pedagogy as a framework for social transformation in Nepal.

Literature Review

This paper reviewed various literature concerning how education system plays significant role in shaping social values and ideology in different nations across the world.

Sahlberg (2007) explored on the Finnish education system and found that it was linked with the social and political culture of the nation, and had features of flexibility, creativity, accountability, productivity, and good governance. Similarly, Bridges (2020) found that the Cuban educational system focused on socialist values to keep its revolutionary ideology alive among its future generations. However, Lwin (2019) criticized education system in Myanmar for centralizing culture of the ruling class excluding the local knowledge and indigenous culture.

Otsu (2000) revealed that the subjects Civics and Social Studies were designed to develop civic values such as democracy, national identity, social inclusion, self-empowerment and internationalism among Japanese students. Similarly, Madrassah school system helped to develop high level of honesty, sincerity, respect and patriotism in Islamic students in Pakistan (Ahmed, Shaukat & Abiodullah, 2009). However, Saikia (2025) found that the integration of education and technology in Indian education system has expanded learning beyond traditional national parameter to global sphere while reinforcing Indian national and cultural identities. Indonesian education system focused certain ethical values such as honesty, courage, work ethic and collaboration integrating education with cultural values (Palennari, Jamaluddin, Syam, Rosba, Machmud, & Fatmawati, 2023). Similarly, Malaysian education system prioritized moral education to develop morally competent citizens to handle with modern complexities while promoting social unity (Hafizi, Kamarudin, & Ibrahim, 2024). In the same way, Qiushuang, & Dmitrievna, (2021) found that Chinese education system integrated morality and knowledge to preserve tradition and modernity strengthening moral values of the Chinese citizens.

However, there is limited literature about the role of education system in Nepal. In this paper, the role of Nepali education system in creating social values has been analyzed. Nepali education system has gone through *Panchayati* conservative ideals of nationalism to present neo-liberal democratic social values. This study follows a systematic review of the Nepali education system through documentary analysis, and it presents critical pedagogy as a powerful approach to reform oppressive social values in the context of Nepal.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative documentary analysis approach. It has mainly used secondary sources such as national education commission reports, constitutional documents, curriculum frameworks, higher education policy documents, and scholarly books and journal articles related to education, ideology, and critical pedagogy. Documentary analysis enables a systematic examination of how educational discourse, policy objectives, and curricular priorities reflect changing social and political values over time.

I searched the relevant research articles and criticism with the help of search engines such as Google and Google Scholar. The keywords 'Critical pedagogy', 'curriculum', 'democratic values', 'education policy', and 'social values' helped a lot to collect the secondary data and information related to this article. Most of the research articles were taken from online and published journals and books. I also explored government agencies' websites to find current education policies. For the data analysis, the findings of the collected sources were synthesized and analyzed in under various themes as suggested by Terry et al., (2017).

Results and Discussions

This article has made systematic review of entire education system, and analyzed these findings thematically. For the organization of this part, I have divided it into five themes: education during the *Panchayati* period, education after the restoration of democracy, social values in educational policies and curriculum frameworks, social values in higher education, and critical pedagogy and social transformation.

Education during the Panchayati Period

The *Panchayati* education system was grounded in ideals of national unity, monarchy, and cultural homogeneity. Educational policies during this period promoted the Nepali language, Hindu cultural values, and the image of the brave Gorkhali as unifying symbols in a multilingual and multiethnic society (Onta,

1996). The *National Education System Plan (NESP) of 1971–1976* explicitly aimed to produce citizens loyal to the monarchy, nation, and Panchayat system by synthesizing language, culture, and tradition (Ministry of Education, 1971).

Although the *Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NEPC) of 1956* initially emphasized education based on local context and cultural needs (Pandey et al., 1956), later policies were directed to legitimize the Panchayati regime and suppress dissenting voices (Caddell, 2007). Consequently, education functioned as an ideological apparatus that centralized the socio-cultural values of the ruling elite, and it aimed to produce citizens loyal to the crown, nation, nationality, and *Panchayati* system.

Education after the Restoration of Democracy

The restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990 marked a significant shift in educational philosophy in Nepal. The *Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal (1990)* recognized Nepal as a multilingual and multiethnic nation and guaranteed the right to primary education in one's own mother tongue (His Majesty's Government, 1999). Subsequent education commission reports emphasized inclusiveness, social justice, democratic values, and national unity amidst diversity (National Education Commission, 1992).

The *Constitution of Nepal (2015)* further strengthened these commitments by ensuring free and basic education and promoting linguistic and cultural rights (Government of Nepal, 2015). The government of Nepal has also signed in the international commitment for education for all (Pradhan, 2018). However, neoliberal reforms and the expansion of private education have also introduced challenges, particularly the dominance of English-medium instruction over mother-tongue education (Poudyal, 2013).

Thus, the social and political changes have influenced the Nepali education system, and the government of Nepal's commitment to the millennium development goal has also influenced it. Now Nepali education system has been facing the challenges of maintaining a national identity as well as the global need for inclusion in education.

Social Values in Educational Policies and Curriculum Frameworks

Educational policies and curriculum frameworks in Nepal provide important insights into the social values promoted by the education system. While Panchayati-era policies emphasized loyalty, moral discipline, and centralized cultural norms, post-1990 policies foregrounded human rights, democratic values, inclusiveness, and social harmony (High-level National Education Commission, 1999; Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2019).

National Curriculum Frameworks (2005, 2007, 2019) consistently highlight value education, civic consciousness, ethical conduct, respect for diversity, and social justice (Curriculum Development Centre, 2005, 2007, 2019). Subjects such as Social Studies, Moral Education, and *Mero Serophero* are specifically designed to inculcate socio-cultural values and civic responsibility among Nepali students, which resonates to the findings of Otsu, K. (2000) in Japan that explored the subjects Civics and Social Studies were designed to develop civic values among Japanese citizens.

Hence, these policy documents show that Nepali education system has been influenced by the change in political system. *Panchayati* education system focused on centralized social values and cultures of ruling elite class, whereas education policies after the restoration of multi-party democratic system has emphasized the inclusiveness and decentralization in education.

Social Values in Higher Education

Higher education institutions in Nepal also play a significant role in fostering social values. Universities such as Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu University, and Nepal Open University offer programs in humanities, social sciences, education, arts, and development studies that emphasize human values, culture, ethics, and life skills (Kathmandu University, 2020; Nepal Open University, 2018; Tribhuvan University, 2020). These programs aim to produce socially responsible and critically aware

graduates capable of contributing to national development.

Critical Pedagogy and Social Transformation

Critical pedagogy provides a theoretical framework for linking education with social justice and democratic transformation. Freirean pedagogy views education as a moral and political practice that fosters critical consciousness and empowers learners to challenge oppressive structures (Giroux, 2010). McLaren (2005) further emphasizes the role of critical pedagogy in exposing power relations and class domination embedded within educational systems. Darder and Mirón (2006) also explored the relation of ethics and morality with power and politics within the paradigm of critical pedagogy.

In the Nepali context, the lack of critical and locally grounded pedagogy has been identified as a factor contributing to educational inequality and poor performance in community schools (Parajuli & Das, 2013). By connecting classroom practices with broader social realities such as class, caste, gender, and culture, critical pedagogy can help amplify marginalized voices and transform oppressive social values.

Conclusion and Implications

This article has analyzed the role of the Nepali education system in creating and transforming social values from the Panchayati era to the present federal democratic republic. The findings demonstrate that education in Nepal has been deeply influenced by political ideology, shifting from centralized, elite-dominated cultural values to more inclusive and democratic orientations. National education policies, curriculum frameworks, and higher education programs increasingly emphasize social values, civic responsibility, human rights, and cultural diversity.

The study highlights critical pedagogy as a powerful approach for linking education with social transformation and inclusion. Thus, this study contributes to improving current education policies so that they may cater the need of social inclusion and equity. While this analysis is limited by its reliance on documentary sources, it provides a foundation for future empirical research on the relationship between education, social values, and social change in Nepal.

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