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Exploring Key Factors Shaping Curriculum Development: A Nepali Perspective

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Abstract

Curriculum development is a complex and dynamic process influenced by multiple factors including philosophy, psychology, socio-cultural context, and the nature of knowledge required by contemporary society. This article explores these broad influences in the context of Nepal's educational system, highlighting how philosophical traditions such as perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and others shape curricular aims and content. Psychological considerations emphasize learner needs and developmental readiness, while socio-cultural factors ensure relevance and inclusiveness in a diverse society. The evolving demands of knowledge further necessitate continuous curricular adaptations to meet global and local challenges. Understanding these interrelated factors provides critical insights for policymakers and educators aiming to design effective, responsive curricula that address both individual and societal educational goals in Nepal.

Keywords: Perennialism, Essentialism, Progressivism, Educational reform

Introduction

The concept of curriculum has undergone significant transformation over time, adapting to the changing needs, contexts, and philosophies of education. Traditionally seen as a static collection of subjects or content to be delivered in schools, curriculum is now understood as a dynamic process involving planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning experiences aimed at holistic student development (Print, 1993; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2017). It encompasses not only the knowledge to be transmitted but also the values, attitudes, and skills that shape learners' development in specific socio-cultural contexts. Understanding the philosophical and psychological foundations of curriculum is essential for meaningful educational reform. Foundational perspectives guide the goals, content, methodology, and evaluation mechanisms of curriculum, ensuring they align with broader aims of human development, national identity, and social justice. Without a strong theoretical grounding,

curriculum reform risks becoming fragmented or superficial, failing to meet the needs of diverse learners and changing societies.

In the context of Nepal, curriculum development has been closely linked to historical shifts, cultural values, and national policy imperatives. From traditional Gurukul education to modern public schooling, Nepal's curriculum has been influenced by both Eastern and Western epistemologies. The Curriculum Framework of Nepal (CDC, 2076) emphasizes student-centred learning, moral and social values, inclusivity, and competency-based approaches. It reflects an attempt to balance global educational trends with indigenous knowledge systems and national goals.

This study aims to explore the philosophical and psychological foundations of curriculum with specific reference to the Nepalese context. By analysing how these foundations shape curriculum design and implementation in Nepal, the study highlights the theoretical underpinnings necessary for creating a relevant, inclusive, and transformative educational system. The findings aim to support educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in making informed, grounded decisions in curriculum planning and reform.

Curriculum development is a complex and dynamic process shaped by multiple interrelated factors, including philosophical beliefs, learner psychology, socio-cultural contexts, and the demands for contemporary knowledge. In Nepal, the curriculum reflects a rich tapestry of educational philosophies such as perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and pragmatism, yet the interplay among these philosophies remains underexplored. Furthermore, while learner psychology and developmental needs are recognized, their practical incorporation into curriculum design is often overshadowed by socio-cultural and political influences. Nepal's diverse socio-cultural fabric, including linguistic plurality, religious traditions, and community values, significantly impacts curriculum content and pedagogical approaches, posing challenges to creating a universally relevant and inclusive curriculum. At the same time, rapid social and technological changes require the integration of new knowledge and skills, which demands continual curriculum reform. Despite existing frameworks and policies, there is limited comprehensive understanding of how these philosophical, psychological, socio-cultural, and knowledge-related factors collectively shape curriculum development in Nepal. This study aims to fill this gap by systematically examining the influences and interconnections among these factors in the Nepalese context to inform more holistic and responsive curriculum design.

The changing structure and needs of the society urge for specific educational system that fulfills the demand of the time. Curriculum is one of the major components of educational system. The dynamic nature of the curricular intent and its sources demand the changes in the obsolescence parts of the educational programs at school level and at university level as well. The continuous deviation on political agendas call for the simultaneous change on its intertwined parts of the society like economic system, value system, legal system, cultural system, educational system, ideas of social ideals and intelligentsia, and so on. Curriculum development process is an interlinked part of these aspects of society and then of educational program. While incorporating curricular

components one should take consideration on needs and interest of the group to whom it is aiming to serve. The needs of an individual and then society are reflected in aim, contents, strategy and evaluation system of the curriculum. Among these learning experiences is associated with content of the curriculum to be incorporated. The major factors that influence in curriculum development process are: Philosophy of the society, psychology of the learner, socio-cultural context of the society, and type of knowledge that requires for the contemporary society; are discussed in the paragraphs below.

Philosophical Foundations of Curriculum

Philosophical foundations provide the worldview that informs educational goals, values, and practices. Major philosophies such as idealism, realism, pragmatism, and existentialism have deeply influenced curriculum theory. Idealism emphasizes the transmission of eternal truths and moral values, focusing on intellectual and character development (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2017). Realism promotes a curriculum based on observable and empirical knowledge, valuing systematic organization of facts and scientific inquiry. In contrast, pragmatism centers learning on experience, flexibility, and problem-solving, shaping progressive curricula that prioritize learner needs and social relevance (Dewey, 1938). Existentialism encourages self-direction and personal meaning, advocating for curricula that allow individual choice and authenticity in learning (Noddings, 2013).

In Nepal, curriculum development has historically been influenced by spiritual-idealistic traditions rooted in Eastern philosophy, particularly Vedic and Buddhist thought, which emphasize inner growth, discipline, and collective well-being. However, with increasing exposure to global education models, Nepalese curriculum has integrated pragmatic and constructivist perspectives that support learner-centered approaches and social equity (CDC, 2076).

Psychological Foundations of Curriculum

Psychological theories influence how curriculum is designed to align with learners' developmental stages, cognitive processes, and emotional needs. Behaviorism, led by theorists like B.F. Skinner, views learning as conditioned response to stimuli, encouraging skill-based, repetitive, and outcome-oriented curricula (Slavin, 2021). Cognitivism, drawing from Piaget and Bruner, emphasizes mental processes, advocating for sequential and scaffolded learning structures that align with stages of cognitive development (Woolfolk, 2020). Social constructivism, notably advanced by Vygotsky, stresses the social context of learning, suggesting that curriculum should involve collaborative learning and culturally meaningful tasks (Vygotsky, 1978).

In Nepal, psychological insights have been increasingly applied in curriculum development, especially through the integration of child psychology and multiple intelligences theories. The Curriculum Development Centre (CDC, 2076) promotes competency-based education that aligns with learners' cognitive, emotional, and social development, reflecting constructivist influence.

Foundational Curricular Shifts in Nepal

The evolution of curriculum in Nepal reflects a gradual shift from rote memorization and textbook dependency to more experiential and value-based learning models. The National Curriculum Framework (CDC, 2076) emphasizes contextual relevance, inclusive education, moral development, and life skills. Recent curriculum reforms aim to decentralize content, integrate local knowledge, and promote active learning strategies, inspired by both global best practices and indigenous pedagogies (CERID, 2019).

Moreover, the growing emphasis on character education, critical thinking, and mindfulness reflects a fusion of psychological research and Eastern philosophical insights. Such hybrid foundations support curriculum models that are not only technically sound but also culturally rooted and spiritually meaningful (Tisdell, 2003; Zohar & Marshall, 2000).

Curriculum development is fundamental to educational effectiveness and relevance, directly impacting the quality of teaching and learning experiences. In Nepal, frequent curricular reforms have been undertaken to respond to changing societal needs, yet challenges persist in harmonizing diverse philosophical foundations, learner psychology, socio-cultural realities, and emerging knowledge demands. Understanding the multifaceted factors influencing curriculum design is crucial for developing educational programs that are not only academically sound but also culturally sensitive and psychologically appropriate.

Despite numerous policy initiatives, there is limited empirical research examining how philosophical ideologies, psychological principles of learning, socio-cultural diversity, and the evolving knowledge landscape jointly influence the curriculum development process in Nepal. This gap hampers the ability of educators and policymakers to design curricula that are truly inclusive, learner-centered, and future-ready. By investigating these dimensions, this study seeks to provide insights that can guide more informed, balanced, and contextually relevant curriculum decisions, ultimately enhancing educational outcomes and social cohesion. Moreover, this study's findings can contribute to Nepal's ongoing educational reforms by highlighting the need to integrate theoretical perspectives with practical considerations in curriculum planning and implementation.

Objectives

To identify the various philosophical traditions influencing the Nepalese curriculum development process, to understand the psychological needs and learner characteristics considered during curriculum design in Nepal, and To examine how socio-cultural factors such as language, religion, and community values shape curriculum content and pedagogy.

Research Questions

What philosophical perspectives are most influential in shaping the Nepalese curriculum? In what ways do socio-cultural factors, including language and religion, affect curriculum content and instructional strategies? and how does the Nepalese curriculum address the incorporation of contemporary knowledge and skills required by society today?

Research Gap

While curriculum development is widely recognized as a complex process influenced by multiple factors, existing research in the Nepali context predominantly addresses curriculum content, policy analysis, or pedagogical approaches in isolation. There is a noticeable lack of comprehensive studies that holistically examine how philosophical perspectives, learner psychology, socio-cultural dynamics, and the nature of knowledge intersect and shape curriculum development in Nepal.

Most prior studies focus either on philosophical underpinnings or socio-cultural issues separately, without integrating these with psychological factors or the demands of contemporary knowledge systems. Additionally, much of the literature relies on theoretical discourse rather than empirical investigation with curriculum practitioners and policymakers. This gap limits the understanding of how these diverse factors practically influence curriculum decisions and implementation on the ground.

By addressing this gap, the present study aims to fill the void through an integrative exploration of these factors, informed by qualitative data from curriculum experts, teachers, and policymakers in Nepal. This approach will contribute valuable insights to the field and support the design of curricula that are both contextually relevant and responsive to evolving educational needs.

Methodology

This section outlines the methodological framework adopted to explore the multifaceted influences on curriculum development in Nepal. Guided by the stated objectives and research questions, the study employs a systematic approach to investigate the interplay of philosophical, psychological, and socio-cultural factors. The methodology ensures alignment between the research purpose and the strategies used for data collection and analysis

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the influence of philosophical, psychological, socio-cultural, and knowledge factors on the curriculum development process in Nepal. Qualitative methods are appropriate for gaining in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena and the perspectives of curriculum developers, educators, and policymakers (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants and Sampling

The study involved 18 participants selected purposefully for their direct involvement and expertise in curriculum development in Nepal. These included 5 curriculum experts from the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), 4 educational policymakers from the Ministry of

Education, 6 secondary school teachers actively engaged in curriculum implementation, and 3 academic scholars specializing in education research. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure the selection of individuals with substantial knowledge and experience relevant to curriculum design and application (Palinkas et al., 2015). Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved, which occurred after interviewing the 18 participants

Data Collection

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and document analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing curriculum development. Interviews focused on participants' insights regarding the roles of philosophical, psychological, socio-cultural, and knowledge-related factors in shaping curriculum decisions. To enhance the validity of findings, official curriculum documents, national education policy papers, and curriculum frameworks published by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) were systematically reviewed and analyzed. This triangulation of data sources provided context and depth to participants' perspectives (Bowen, 2009).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the collected data, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: data familiarization, generation of initial codes, theme identification, theme review, theme definition and naming, and final report production. NVivo software facilitated the coding process and organization of qualitative data. This approach enabled the identification of recurring patterns and themes concerning the influence of philosophical, psychological, socio-cultural, and knowledge-based factors on curriculum development in Nepal.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Data were securely stored and used solely for research purposes.

Findings

The findings of this study reveal a multifaceted influence of philosophical, psychological, socio-cultural, and knowledge-related factors on the curriculum development process in Nepal. Through thematic analysis of interviews with curriculum experts, policymakers, and educators, alongside document review, it became evident that these factors collectively shape not only the content and objectives of the curriculum but also its instructional methods and evaluation strategies. Participants emphasized that the curriculum is deeply rooted in Nepal's socio-cultural realities and philosophical traditions, reflecting the nation's diverse cultural heritage and educational goals. Psychological considerations related to learners' cognitive development and interests also play a critical role in shaping curricular decisions, ensuring that learning experiences are both relevant and accessible. Furthermore, the dynamic socio-cultural environment and evolving knowledge demands of contemporary

society compel continual revision and adaptation of curricular frameworks. This section presents these findings in detail, organized around the core themes identified during analysis. The data collected from curriculum experts, educational policymakers, school teachers, and scholars are presented thematically to reflect the influence of philosophical, psychological, socio-cultural, and knowledge-related factors on the curriculum development process in Nepal.

The analysis of interviews and document reviews revealed four broad themes reflecting the influence on curriculum development in Nepal: philosophical foundations, psychological considerations of learners, socio-cultural context, and the nature of knowledge demanded by contemporary society.

Discussion

Philosophical Foundations

Participants emphasized the role of diverse educational philosophies shaping Nepalese curricula, including perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and pragmatism. These philosophies guide curriculum objectives, content selection, and instructional approaches. For example, the focus on core skills such as literacy and numeracy reflect perennialist and essentialist influences, while the inclusion of interdisciplinary subjects aligns with progressivist ideals. The pragmatic aspect was observed in attempts to align curriculum with societal utility and learner interests, although predetermined objectives remain predominant (CDC, 2063; Lynch, 2016; Shawal, 2015).

Psychological Considerations of Learners

Psychological factors, including developmental stages, cognitive abilities, motivation, and individual differences, were acknowledged as crucial in curriculum planning. Respondents highlighted the need for curricula to accommodate diverse learner needs and promote active engagement. However, challenges remain in fully operationalizing learner-centered pedagogies within existing rigid frameworks (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2017).

Socio-Cultural Context

The curriculum reflects Nepal's rich cultural diversity and social values. Incorporation of moral education, religious philosophies (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam), and local traditions demonstrate the socio-cultural embedding of the curriculum. Participants noted the balancing act between preserving cultural identity and integrating global perspectives, particularly in light of Nepal's multicultural and multilingual population (Reema, 2011; CDC, 2076).

Nature of Knowledge for Contemporary Society

Curriculum development also responds to the evolving demands of knowledge in a rapidly changing world. Emphasis on science, technology, environmental awareness, and

social sciences indicates alignment with national development goals and global trends. Respondents underscored the importance of integrating practical skills and critical thinking to prepare learners for future challenges (CDC, 2076; Lynch, 2016).

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the multifaceted nature of curriculum development in Nepal, shaped by an interplay of philosophical, psychological, socio-cultural, and knowledge-related factors. Philosophical foundations provide essential guiding frameworks that influence educational aims and content, while psychological insights remind educators of the importance of learner-centered approaches, despite current implementation challenges. Socio-cultural elements ensure the curriculum remains relevant to Nepal's diverse population by embedding cultural values and traditions alongside global perspectives. Lastly, the evolving nature of knowledge demands continuous adaptation of the curriculum to equip learners with the skills necessary for contemporary societal participation.

This integrative understanding emphasizes that curriculum development is not a static process but a dynamic and context-sensitive endeavor. Policymakers and curriculum designers in Nepal should maintain a balanced consideration of these factors to create educational programs that are culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate, and future-oriented. Future research may explore practical strategies for enhancing learner participation and flexibility within the curriculum to better reflect the pragmatic philosophy and psychological needs identified in this study.

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