

CURRICULUM CONCEPTUALIZATION AMONG UNIVERSITY TEACHERS IN NEPAL

Rabin Sharma*

Lecturer at Tribhuvan University, Nepal.

Received 26 March 2024; Revised 03 April 2024; Accepted 06 April 2024

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to understand the conceptualization scenario of the curriculum by the university teachers in Nepal. Curriculum is an often-debated topic and it is instrumental to comprehend how academic professionals link it with different definitions of curriculum i.e., either as a content, experience, plan and system. This article follows a qualitative design and to foster the inclusion of diverse experiences, 20 lecturers from different universities in Nepal underwent an interview. The major findings of this paper include the disparity in the understanding of curriculum and also revealed the causes behind the lack of implementation of curriculum. Utmost reluctance from the side of students, non-performance and lack of monitoring and evaluation from the curriculum development authorities and hesitance by the institutes to foster cost-cutting and improper resource allocation have contributed to the implementation gap. On top of this, different pedagogical practices and the scenario of alternative assessment procedures in Nepal have been analyzed along with recommendations to overcome the issues.

Keywords: Curriculum, Implementation, Alternative assessment, Reluctance, conceptualization

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum is often regarded as a blueprint that comprises of subject-matter, series of planned experiences, medium of instruction, and substantial goals that a student would meet at the end of the course. Curriculum refers to a plan for learning or a track that is to be followed to achieve the central objective set by the beneficiary (Akker, 2002). In context of Nepal, curriculum is a heated debate that usually happens amid the academia and policy makers. This paper encapsulates the understanding of curriculum by different teachers tutoring at university level, i.e., bachelors and master's level. The researcher representing the faculty of management at a college that affiliates to Tribhuvan University and Purbanchal University strives to bring upon the current affairs and general perception of teachers in response to the curriculum.

A popular phrase, i.e., "input quality determines output quality." could be linked as a metaphor to comprehend the importance of a curriculum;

***Correspondence to:** Rabin Sharma, Lecturer at Tribhuvan University; Kathmandu, Nepal, Tel: 9860170223; E-mail: sharmaroveen@gmail.com

the quality quotient that gets injected or taught during the learning process gives rise to the same standard of impact on the outcome generated by the student. Generally, people consider that curriculum that are western-influenced are moreover robust and pragmatic that subsequently makes the student smarter and progressive.

Included, but not limited to, the subject-matter taught in the classroom is not only enhances their academic capability but also polishes their hard skills. It ultimately becomes a competitive advantage for a student and accordingly helps in building individual competences.

Concerning the methodology while undergoing the formulation of this paper, interview with 20 teachers teaching at university level and their convictions are put forward in the following table. Phenomenology has been used to understand their subjective experience regarding the curriculum as they have been student in some point of their life, a teacher and even involved in the curriculum development process. The experiences that they have gone through is instrumental (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Relation with Curriculum Definitions.

Teacher's Code	Conceptualization of Curriculum	Relation with Curriculum Definitions	Relation Dynamics
Dipesh	Curriculum is a list of subject matter prescribed by a certain education institution that is to be taught to the students of a certain department and is targeted to a certain year or level in order to build skills and knowledge as required.	Content	This definition focuses on curriculum as a detailed academic matter provided by an educational institution, emphasizing the specific content that is to be taught.
Tara P.	It refers to a planned course of structure that is to be taught to the students within a certain time period. It includes the modus operandi that a teacher has to go through before teaching the course	Plan	Illustrates curriculum as a planned course of structure, emphasizing the structured nature of the educational plan that is designed to be taught over a specific time period.
Aniket	It is simply a set of rules that is prescribed by an academic authority and binds students to follow it. Not adhering to the contents put on by the authority represents violation of the jurisdiction of the curriculum board	System	Refers curriculum as a set of rules formulated by a jurisdiction holding body, highlighting the systemic nature of rules that bind students to follow a specific plan.
Gaurav	It is just a collective form of topics that is designed as per the requirement of the level of the student. The grade and hierarchy of the student depends what sort of curriculum is to be prepared so that they can grasp the actual meaning and essence of it	Content	Describes curriculum as an integrated form of subject topics designed based on the study strata of the student, emphasizing the content that is designed for specific educational activity.
Yek Nath	Curriculum ensures the holistic development of a student through its different components like rubrics and time-frame. Rubrics help student to know their strengths and weaknesses. Also, it is instrumental in preparing for their assignments or exams as it simply provides the allocation of time and anticipated answers along with grades.	Experience	Emphasizes development of overall aspects of a student through inclusion of several components like rubrics and time-frame, highlighting the experiential nature of curriculum in shaping a student's overall educational experience.

Sujal	Curriculum is a blueprint that is formulated by the Curriculum Development Authorities to enact students in learning. It comprises of different things that is to be followed by the teacher as well as pupil.	Plan	Highlights curriculum as a roadmap formulated by authorities, emphasizing the planned and organized nature of the educational structure.
Asmita	Curriculum includes what is to be taught, how is it to be taught, when is it taught and by when is it to be taught. How, What, Why, When and Who are the things that is to be considered.	System	Includes what, how, when, and by when is it to be taught, emphasizing the systematic and organized approach to education.
Ajay	Curriculum is a practical model that helps to ensure the pragmatic skills of the students. It not only helps a student pass the examination but come up with skills.	Experience	Defines curriculum as a skill-based model ensuring real-life skill sets, emphasizing the experiential and practical aspects of learning.
Narayan	It is the combination of student experiences that happens within the study session. Each of the student have a cognition and experience things differently, thus, curriculum ensures such unique experience	Experience	Explains curriculum as the integration of student experiences within a study session, emphasizing the overall experiential nature of the learning process.
Pradeep	Is it a meticulously designed plan of action that consistently requires changes and amendments. It is not static but is dynamic with respect to time, place, circumstances and situation.	Plan	The interview stresses that curriculum is a carefully designed core plan, highlighting the structured and intentional nature of curriculum development.
Rishikesh	Curriculum is what students expect to learn to enrich their lifestyle. It is to be designed as per the content that students desire to learn. For instance, AI is what most of the students in the current context want to learn about, hence, it should be encompassed.	Content	Highlights curriculum as what students anticipate to gain through learning during their academic session, emphasizing the focus on the content that enriches students' knowledge.
Krishna	In my opinion, curriculum is a customized set of subjects that a student wishes to learn to develop their hard skills (Interview with an American university student)	Content	Provides that curriculum is a personalized set of subjects, emphasizing the content that a student desires to learn for their individual skill development.
Omprakash	Curriculum is a set of activities that is to be performed by the students during their entire academic session. Whether it is presentation, group discussion or any other activity, the curriculum provides a pathway.	Plan	Defines curriculum as a involvement in different activities that is to be performed by students, emphasizing the planned nature of educational activities.
Deepak	It comprises of specific and particular topics that a student wants to have a specialization on. For example, MBA-HR, MBA-Finance	Content	Explores curriculum as comprising specific and particular topics, highlighting the specialized content in different areas
Prateema	Curriculum is an aim that is to be set by a teacher themselves in order to make the students competent practically. It is up to the teacher if they set a proper goal for themselves and for the students as well, otherwise the tangible outcome will not be achieved.	System	Interprets curriculum as a target set by a teacher, emphasizing the goal-setting aspect that is part of a larger educational system.
Anita	It is goal which is specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and is within the time-frame. Curriculum shall not be generic, and should be realistic in nature, i.e., possible to perform and complete as per the level of the students.	Plan	Describes curriculum as a goal with specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound characteristics, emphasizing the planned and structured nature of goals.

Ankita	Curriculum is a form of positioned materials that guide students to achieve their learning outcome. It begins in an initiative level targeting the beginners and then accordingly enhances the expertise through the contents	System	Illustrates curriculum as carefully juxtaposed materials which is in a continuum (that ensures learning in a systematic way) that helps students, emphasizing the scientific guidance provided by curriculum materials.
Ritesh	Prevalent issues are indulged in a curriculum with respect to the scenario in the market and prepares student to accustom in such situation. A curriculum should focus on problem-solving skill of a student rather than just theoretical aspect	Content	Describes curriculum as a solution to prevalent issues in the market, preparing students for real-world situations, emphasizing the content's relevance to the market scenario.
Dipshana	Curriculum is a student-centered course that navigates the student easily, systematically and enthusiastically through their academic life. Student already have a systematic approach in their mind, however, curriculum plays a vital role to let them show the right path	System	Highlights curriculum as a student-centered course that navigates students through their academic life, emphasizing the systematic guidance and support provided by the curriculum.
Suraj	Curriculum is often regarded as a set of plans that is to be followed, however, it is a guided principle by self-vested authorities who want students to have a particular intended knowledge as per their discretion and with the objective of gaining policy achievement.	System	The interviewee provides that curriculum is a system that is pre-set by the concerned authorities with an objective of meeting the anticipated outcome.

From the above table, it can be understood that there is a diverse set of comprehension and conviction held by the teachers on the concept of curriculum. It is evident that curriculum is conceptualized in different ways by the teachers. However, going through all these interviews, the researcher found that each teacher is positive towards the holistic development of a student despite it not being mentioned in the curriculum. The realization of having different set of activities to enhance the hard as well as soft skill of the students is crucial. The common consensus among the 20 conceptualized aspects of curriculum denotes that there is a hopeful prospect from the side of teachers with respect to the implementation and smooth operation of the curriculum.

PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS IN RESPONSE TO CURRICULUM CATEGORIES

As demonstrated in the table above, each of the conceptualization of curriculum provided by the university teachers is allocated to specific categories, i.e., curriculum as a content, experience, plan and system. On top of this, each of these categories have a philosophical root that is to be comprehended critically. The upcoming segments discuss the relevance of these categories with different philosophical perspectives.

CONSTRUCTIVISM

Constructivism is a philosophical perspective propounded by Lev Vygotsky which provides that learners construct their understanding when they are exposed to the environment and undergo an incessant level of interaction. It is derived from the concept of cognitive psychology and ensures that

knowledge is to be gained through interaction by the learners themselves as the involvement leads to creation of new ideas and also urges the sharing culture (Burbules, 2009). For example, a curriculum that comprises of in-person activities such as group discussion, project appraisal, etc., which is supposed to be completed in order to gain skills such as communication, decision-making and persuasion. It can be linked with the concept of curriculum as a system as the processing results into a generation of significant level of outcomes.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

The concept of critical pedagogy is often related with the banking model as provided by Paulo Freire. In relation to the critical theory, it challenges the banking model of education that is centralized on a one-way flow of knowledge, as compared to banks; receiving, sorting and storing deposits. It is an analogy to understand that the curriculum is not limited to inflow the knowledge into the mind of a learner, however, it shall encourage the students to challenge the ideas, achieve self-awareness through introspection and transform their learning pattern (Greene, 1986). The learners should not be the passive recipients of the knowledge provided by the teacher, however, should be able to critically analyze and interpret it accordingly which can be assured by a planned curriculum.

PRAGMATISM

Pragmatism primarily focuses on enhancing the problem-solving and decision-making skills of a learner. As the word suggests, it ensures that the learner gains practical skills in the due course during their study period. A curriculum is to be instrumental in crafting a progressive and realistic experience for a student. It is said that students are the pillars of the nation, thus, they have to undergo several novice experiences in their further lifetime which could be obstructive if they become indecisive at the moment. To address this potential issue, curriculum indulges a set of insights that helps in gaining different experiences that activate their both laterals of the brain, i.e., creativity and academics. For instance, cooking, swimming, driving, etiquette, communication, persuasion, decision-making, etc. are few of the life skills that a curriculum is supposed to ensure.

POST-MODERNISM

The wave of post-modernism in education was initiated in the late 20th century that focused on subjectivity, flexibility and responsiveness in the curriculum. The post-modern approach to education claims that the curriculum should be dynamic as per the need of the learners, i.e., it should not static or remain constant (Maker & Nielson, 1996). However, shall be customized with respect to the time, requirement, circumstances and market scenario. For instance, the different specializations that we can observe in the management studies prescribed by the Tribhuvan University such as MBA-General, MBA-Finance, MBA-HR, MBA-Global Leadership, MBA-Technology, etc. justifies the flavor of post-modernism in the curriculum. The students get what they

want and how they visualize themselves in their potential professional career (Table 2).

Table 2. Linkage between curriculum concepts with philosophical roots.

S.N.	Concepts of Curriculum	Philosophical Roots
1.	Experience	Constructivism
2.	Content	Critical Pedagogy
3.	Plan	Pragmatism
4.	System	Post-modernism

DEFINITIONAL ISSUES

As there is a plethora of philosophical perspectives that could be related to describe the definitional aspect of curriculum, the diverse interpretation and a number of convictions provided by several scholars, educators, policy makers, practitioners and educational leaders conceptualize the essence of curriculum in different ways which has created disparity in-between. It can be referred as definitional issues in the domain of curriculum.

After having a detailed conversation with the different lecturers teaching at university level, the researcher found an extreme level of disparity when it comes to the conceptualization of curriculum. Some of them have a narrow concept of curriculum and explain it as plan of instructional materials and other perquisites that is essential in an academic institution to teach the students. However, some lecturers hold a broad understanding of a curriculum as it being an educational experience having other hidden aspects within itself. The most interesting aspect from the broader side is that few of the lecturers implied that curriculum of a certain country has a hidden agenda that is to be fulfilled as influenced by the respective political climate.

The disparity in the understanding started to expand more when I came across the answers to my questions by the lecturers who consider curriculum as an explicit part of the education system such as textbooks, lesson plans, documents, policy, etc. Likewise, others consider curriculum as an implicit aspect such as it shall indulge the values, ethics, norms, culture, tradition, and etiquette. A teacher from an indigenous community claimed that curriculum is supposed to encapsulate the language, literature, music, artform and other aspects to retain and sustain the uniqueness of a certain community.

Considering the conceptualization of curriculum by one of the teachers who referred curriculum as a medium that helps in producing a significant level of outcome, i.e., some teachers take curriculum as a product, whereas some consider it as a process of learning that includes interaction between the students and teachers within a learning environment. Similarly, there have been a conviction on the understanding of curriculum to be interdisciplinary, i.e., it shall encapsulate concepts and ideas from a diverse set of discipline; to ensure the holistic development of a student. Included, but not

limited to, curriculum shall be consistent and conversant with the need and requirement of globalization and liberalization. With the free flow of resources, technology, people, the curriculum shall have global influence and should go through the universal principles.

Implications to Improve Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment Procedures

Based on the interviews conducted with the university lecturers, the curriculum, pedagogical and assessment methods in the Nepalese education system have become obsolete. Although there is presence of curriculum in each level, but it has not found to be properly implemented. When it comes to the causes behind the lack of implementation, it has been found that the institutes are hesitant to follow the systematic procedure that is required by the curriculum because of several reasons such as lack of resources and vigilance in terms of sincerity. The practice of alternative assessment is barely observed despite being mentioned in the curriculum. Few of the prevalent practices in traditional assessment system that the students still undergo during their course are MCQs, essays, true/false questions, short answer questions. This sort of question is straight-forward and does not assure the critical thinking ability of a student.

To understand the disparity in-between, the following questions demonstrates two different forms of assessment systems. The first one is an orthodox set of questions that is constantly used by the universities in their finals. The second set rather represents what is to be asked to students.

Assessment Pattern in the Finals of Universities

- What is business?
- What is the importance of international trade?
- Define United Nations
- What is Supply Chain?
- What is an E-commerce?

Assessment That Should be Followed

- Imagine that you are about to incorporate an e-commerce company. What would your business model look like?
- Under what legal provision your company will be registered? What documents will you submit?
- As an e-commerce company, you will need to design a website. How will you formulate its online presence?
- What sort of things will you incorporate in your website to attract and retain the customers? If you will be following SEO, SEM, please elaborate the tools.

Sharma

- As a CEO, you will be recruiting employees in your organization, what are the basic things that is to be considered as per Labor Act, 2074?
- Nepal Government has introduced Social Security Fund since 2017. What do you think about it? Will you be paying the salary every month in relation to the SSF?
- Let's assume, you got a cheque from your client and while the clearing process at bank, you found that it has insufficient funds. What legal remedy will you take?

A plethora of strategies exist for ensuring effective curriculum implementation through alternative assessments. These methods contribute to the development of academic competency and enhance practical skills in students. Personalized and individual assignment promote progressive pedagogy and foster both hard and soft skill. For example, project-based assignments, assignments centered on specific subjects facilitate the cultivation of problem-solving, research, and communication skills. On top of this, it also helps network building. This approach ensures the practical application of theoretical knowledge in real-life scenarios, often presented either individually or collaboratively in group settings within educational institutions.

Top universities like the Oxford, Harvard, Yale, MIT, Stanford undergo these strategies and it has found to be extremely instrumental. Case studies, role-playing, and short-term internships at different organization help students in translating cognitive abilities into practice. Open book examinations, paper writing, article reviews, and critical commentating exemplify critical thinking. Peer assignments, conducted in groups encourage collaboration, discussion, and consensus-building among students. This method not only promotes interpersonal and communication skills but also allows drawing inferences based on group consensus. Digital assignments that includes online quizzes, multimedia presentations, and simulations foster personalized learning and enhance technical know-how contributing to the refinement of students' intelligence quotient.

At another part of the spectrum, i.e., assessment through teachers, observation models, where teachers or professors directly or indirectly assess students, provide insights into learners' abilities. This form of assessment includes participative, direct, and indirect observation methods. In-depth conversation, seminar and conferences serve as effective means to assess both theoretical and practical knowledge as it offers an in-person and holistic understanding of an individual. These interactions also provide valuable insights into psychological behavior and emotional biases. Implementing alternative assessment methods such as OBE, article reviews, e-portfolios for progress tracking, presentations, and take-away examinations can contribute to a comprehensive grading system based on predefined parameters which can be made pervasive for all the universities.

Additionally, integrating final project works into the curriculum, also referred as capstone where students prepare analysis reports to present in

front of authorities enhances confidence and communication skills. This practice establishes positive relations with the stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, bureaucrats, government, ensuring the recognition of students' contributions. Also, it sets a benchmark precedent that will be potentially followed by the upcoming students. Generally, it has been found that students tend to follow the assessment procedures that their seniors went through and take it as a reference for their easy understanding. This progressive move for learning would be beneficial as well as sustainable in the long-run.

CONCLUSION

There is a multitude of understanding of curriculum by the university teachers in Nepal. Some of them considering it as either a plan, system, experience or content, each of the reasoning is valid as they have supported their arguments with the proper convictions and examples. This disparity in the curriculum paves a way to create different modus operandi of teaching. It has a direct impact on how they teach and what they expect from the students. When it comes to the implications of curriculum in Nepal, although the realization of having alternative assessment methods such as CAS (Continuous Assessment System) and other methods have already been encompassed in the curriculum, we can find an implementation gap in-between. The lack of monitoring and evaluation, insincerity and hesitance from the side of the students, lack of updates from the curriculum development board, and non-performance by the institutes has become a triad dimension behind the curriculum gap. Unless these issues are resolved, the curriculum implementation will not take a robust momentum.

REFERENCES

- Akker, J. D. (2002). Curriculum Perspectives: An Introduction. *Curriculum Landscapes and Trend*, 1-3.
- Burbules, N. C. (2009). Postmodernism and Education. *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education*, pp: 2-11.
- Fook, C. Y., & Sidhu, G. K. (2010). Authentic assessment and pedagogical strategies in higher education. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 7, 153-161.
- Greene, M. (1986). In search of a critical pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56, 427-441.
- Maker, C. J., & Nielson, A. B. (1996). Curriculum development and teaching strategies for gifted learners.
- Perez, M. C., Vidal, P., & Pino, J. (2022). The role of self and peer assessment in Higher Education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 47, 612-613.