



Politics of Pedagogical Practices: Basic Education across Political Regimes in Nepal

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Abstract

The political transformation of 1990 ended the partyless Panchayat system and reinstated multiparty democracy in Nepal, laying the foundation for comprehensive educational reform. In this context, the National Education Commission was established in 1991. The commission recommended major reforms across several aspects of school-level education to bring about fundamental change. It proposed significant changes in the school curriculum, subjects and content, teaching methods, instructional materials, and assessment systems to align the education system with the values of multiparty democracy. Based on its recommendations, improvements were made in certain areas of school education. Subsequently, in 1999, another High-Level Education Commission was formed, which also provided recommendations for reforming various aspects of the school education system. The movement of 2006 led to the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a federal democratic republic. In line with this political shift, new suggestions were made regarding the school curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment practices. Over time, corresponding changes were introduced in education policy, curricula, and the overall school education system. This study aims to explore the major transformations in school education - encompassing curriculum development, instructional content, medium of instruction, instructional materials, assessment procedures, physical infrastructure, and financing of education - following the establishment of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. This study employed an iterative inductive-deductive approach, grounded in policy documents and relevant literature. Findings were thematically organized and rigorously validated for reliability and consistency, with translations provided for Nepali sources where required. This study highlights significant reforms in the education sector, including the adoption of modern curriculum development principles, learner-centered teaching, and assessment for learning procedure in pedagogical practices. However, these theoretical advancements have not been fully realized in practice, as classrooms remain rather depressing and teacher-centered teaching persist. Student assessments are often superficial, while inadequate physical infrastructure and problematic financing of school education continue to challenge school education.

Keywords: Primary education, curriculum, medium of instruction, assessment, teaching learning

Introduction

The Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC), established in 1954 as the first national education commission, marked a foundational step in shaping Nepal's modern education system (Aryal, 1970; Shah, 2020). The commission undertook a comprehensive nationwide survey, gathered public perspectives on educational needs, and produced the seminal report *Education in Nepal* in 1956. This report critically evaluated the existing educational structures and proposed a strategic framework for a national education system (NNEPC, 1956). Accordingly, the All-Round National Education Committee (ARNEC), formed in 1961, recommended a five-year structure for primary education (Sharma, 1990). It defined education as a process of behavioral change and emphasized the formation of good habits as the core objective of primary education (ARNEC, 1961). Although it did not outline formal general objectives, ARNEC identified the development of fifteen fundamental habits- including cleanliness, social responsibility, respect for rules and elders, patriotism, appreciation of others, religious tolerance, awareness of rights and duties, emotional regulation, and active participation in daily life - as essential goals of primary education (ARNEC, 1961; Shah, 2013).

By the late 1960s, Nepalese educationists and the public recognized that the existing education system was dull, rigid, and ineffective in meeting the nation's evolving needs (Aryal, 1977; Acharya, 2002). It was criticized as a poor imitation of Indian colonial education designed to produce clerks rather than address new national aspirations. Leaders failed to realize that changing educational goals require corresponding changes in curriculum, teaching methods, materials, and teacher preparation to effectively serve Nepal's emerging needs (MOE, 1971; Chalise, 1968). In response to the answer, the government established the National Education Advisory Council in 1968 to review the education system and align it with the partyless Panchayat political framework and national development needs. This led to the National Education System Plan (NESP) of 1971, Nepal's first educational plan, which sharply criticized the existing system as elitist, unclear, unproductive, and unsatisfactory (NEC, 1985). The plan aimed to reduce elitism by linking education to productive sectors and egalitarian values, calling for a unified, relevant education system that serves national goals (MOE, 1971). It shifted the view of education from a path to white-collar jobs to an investment in human resources for development (Sharma, 1987; Sharma, 1962). NESP, 1971 conveyed strong dissatisfaction with Nepal's existing education system, describing it as elitist and disconnected from the needs, interests, and aspirations of the population. The plan advocated for the consolidation of education into a single, cohesive system designed to effectively address and support the country's developmental goals and societal aspirations (NEC, 1992).

Between 1971 and 1980, the government made various efforts to implement the new education system as planned. However, many teachers found the revised curriculum, lesson plans, and evaluation methods confusing from the outset (MOE, 1997). Mid-term and final evaluations of the National Education System Plan revealed a significant gap between the intended and actual curriculum (Sharma, 2012). The curriculum remained theoretical and irrelevant, teaching was neither practical nor interactive, and although testing frequency increased, there was no improvement in testing tools, methods, or the use of results (National Education Committee, 1985). Primary education during this period confronted with several critical challenges (Sharma, 2015). Firstly, the objectives of primary education remain vague and inadequately articulated. Secondly, the curriculum is excessively narrow, emphasizing fragmented subject content rather than an integrated learning experience. Thirdly, instructional practices are predominantly dependent on inadequate textbooks, with

minimal teaching and learning activities extending beyond these materials in most schools. Furthermore, curriculum documents rarely reach schools or educators, and even when accessible, they are infrequently engaged with or applied effectively. Finally, numerous studies assessing student academic achievement consistently reveal poor outcomes, although these evaluations tend to overlook other important dimensions of learning.

The political transformation of 1990, which brought an end to the Partyless Panchayat system and reinstated multiparty democracy in Nepal, provided the impetus for comprehensive educational reform. In response, the National Education Commission (NEC) was established in 1991 with the mandate to align the education system with the evolving political, social, and global contexts. Upon reviewing the existing system - operational since 1971 and modified in 1981 - the NEC concluded that substantial reform was urgently required. Although significant progress had been made in expanding educational access, the system continued to suffer from persistent disparities, inefficiencies, deficiencies, and a lack of relevance to the country's needs (NEC, 1992). Primary education, in particular, was found to be severely underperforming, with a low proportion of students advancing through and completing the full five-year cycle. The curriculum was criticized for being elitist and urban-biased, failing to reflect the lived realities and interests of children, especially those in rural areas. Moreover, the curriculum development process was largely confined to a narrow group of experts and lacked inclusive stakeholder engagement. As a result, the educational provisions remained disconnected from the broader national, societal, and individual aspirations and failed to fulfill their intended purpose in practice (NEC, 1992).

The BPEP team (1991-2000) observed that the existing primary education system failed to meet the developmental needs of children, the expectations of parents, and the broader national requirements. Instead, it disproportionately benefited a small minority while neglecting the majority. The team also identified several critical flaws in the primary school textbooks, including a lack of alignment between the curriculum and textbook content. Additionally, there was minimal progression between textbooks across grade levels, and the exercises provided at the end of lessons were found to be overly general and insufficiently tailored to students' learning needs.

In 1990, following a review of primary textbooks and classroom testing under the Primary Education Project (1984-1992), the Ministry of Education and Culture initiated the Primary Curriculum Renewal (CERID, 1992). A Primary Curriculum Steering Committee (PCSC) was formed, which adopted a bottom-up approach to develop the primary education curriculum Parts I and II (CERID, 1994). The 1992 curriculum outlined general objectives, including communication skills, practical mathematical ability, health awareness, environmental understanding, social responsibility, democratic behavior, and the development of confident, disciplined citizens committed to national unity (MOEC, 1992). A study on the effectiveness of the 1998 primary education curriculum, along with the findings of the Higher-Level National Education Commission (HLNEC, 1999) and feedback from various regional and national stakeholder workshops, highlighted shortcomings in the 1992 Primary Education Curriculum. In response, the curriculum was revised in 2003 and piloted in 50 schools across 10 districts in Nepal. Based on the pilot results, further modifications were made in 2005. These revisions aimed to reduce content overload and incorporate higher-level objectives focused on promoting behavioural change. The Primary Education Curriculum 2005 provides a comprehensive outline of the content for primary-level Social Studies, clearly defining both the scope and sequence of the

material. It emphasizes experiential learning through approaches such as learning by doing and project-based methods. However, it does not include a detailed framework for instructional strategies. Similarly, while it recommends the adoption of a continuous assessment system, it does not offer a thorough explanation of the evaluation procedures. Initially, the Primary Education Curriculum 2005 was expected to serve as a relevant and effective model for teachers, parents, and students. However, various studies, particularly those conducted by CERID, have raised several criticisms. These studies highlight that the curriculum's content, pedagogical approaches, and student assessment methods remain inadequate. Despite some modifications introduced by PEC 2005, the intended learning outcomes lack clarity, the content is often irrelevant, and both teaching-learning practices and evaluation procedures continue to be unsatisfactory. To reform education policy, the Government formed the High-Level National Education Commission (HLNEC) in 1997, prioritizing regional balance, social justice, and equitable access in primary education. The report emphasized improving access for disadvantaged groups and enhancing internal efficiency by addressing dropout, repetition, and low completion rates. It also highlighted poor learning outcomes due to inadequate learning environments, untrained and unmotivated teachers, lack of pre-primary education, weak assessment practices, poor infrastructure, delayed textbooks, and limited local involvement in school management (Shah, 2020).

Methods and Materials

This study adopts a qualitative document analysis framework, incorporating both inductive and deductive methodological approaches (Saldana, 2021). Through the inductive lens, data were systematically gathered from a chronological review of key documentary sources (Glesne, 2011), including the reports of education commissions, recommendations from advisory councils, and policy documents related to educational practices during the Panchayat era (1961-1981). These materials were critically examined to identify recurring themes, structural patterns, and content pertaining to the educational landscape of the period. The analysis of specific events, policy measures, and reform initiatives facilitated the formulation of inferences regarding the character and orientation of the education system during this timeframe. The deductive approach was employed to interpret the educational developments of the Panchayat era within the framework of established theoretical paradigms (Creswell, 2015). Drawing on these pre-existing theories, the study elucidates the extent to which educational policies and curricular content were aligned with the ideological imperatives of the ruling regime (Merriam & Tisdell 2015). The integration of both inductive and deductive strategies (Wolfinger, 2002), thus enabled a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the historical and political dimensions underpinning the education system of the Panchayat period.

Results and Discussion

Subsequent to the political transformation of 1990, Nepal evolved from a multi-party democratic system into a Federal Democratic Republic. This transitional period has been marked by profound changes across various sectors, including education, politics, society, and the economy. A critical analysis of educational policy documents from this era has led to the emergence of new concepts and conclusions regarding educational practices. These practices have subsequently been examined and validated through relevant theoretical frameworks. The major findings and outcomes of this study are presented in the following sections.

Basic Education Curriculum

In the 1990s, the Primary Curriculum Steering Committee (PCSC) was formed to lead curriculum development efforts through a bottom-up strategy, which eventually resulted in the creation of the Primary Education Curriculum (PEC) Parts I and II (CERID, 1994). This initiative was largely influenced by the Ministry of Education and Culture's decision in 1990 to launch a curriculum reform. This decision followed a comprehensive 1988 evaluation of primary-level textbooks, where selected lessons were revised and piloted in classrooms as part of the Primary Education Project (1984-1992) (CERID, 1992). The revised 1992 curriculum set forth broad educational objectives, such as enhancing oral and written communication abilities, fostering mathematical problem-solving skills applicable to everyday life, encouraging healthy habits through physical education, promoting environmental awareness and its connection to human life, instilling social values through responsible and cooperative behavior, embracing democratic ideals, and shaping confident, disciplined individuals committed to national development, unity, and identity (Singh, 2012; CERID, 2002).

The Primary Education Curriculum of 2005 delineates a structured and comprehensive framework for Social Studies at the primary level, explicitly articulating the scope and sequence of curricular content (Shah, 2020). It underscores the significance of experiential learning and promotes the integration of project-based methodologies within the instructional process. However, the curriculum lacks a detailed articulation of specific pedagogical strategies necessary for effective implementation. Likewise, although it endorses the principle of continuous assessment, it does not furnish a systematic or comprehensive outline of the procedures and mechanisms for evaluation (Singh, 2012).

The Government of Nepal and the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) have developed curriculum policies, textbooks, teachers' guides, and related instructional materials that consistently emphasize learner-centered and child-friendly pedagogical approaches. This focus is particularly prominent in the Primary Education Curriculum for Grades 1-3 (CDC, 2005) and Grades 4-5 (CDC, 2008). Key features highlighted in foundational documents (CERES, 1995) include the use of the mother tongue as the primary medium of instruction for the majority of students, a strong commitment to learner-centered and participatory learning methods, and a redefined role for teachers as facilitators of learning. The curriculum promotes experiential learning through project work, activity-based instruction, field excursions, role play, problem-solving tasks, and demonstrations to actively engage students. Furthermore, it advocates for inclusive teaching practices that cater to the diverse needs of all learners. Assessment strategies are designed to foster and improve student learning by providing ongoing opportunities for feedback and growth. Additional provisions include maintaining student portfolios for Grades 1-3 and employing a Continuous Assessment System (CAS) to guide grade promotion decisions within these levels.

The BPEP-II Master Plan (1997-2002) undertook a comprehensive situational analysis of the education system during that period, identifying a series of commendable accomplishments as well as significant challenges related to the curriculum (MOE, 1997). Notable strengths included the implementation of a functional approach to curriculum development, the articulation of clearly defined and measurable learning outcomes to be attained by the conclusion of the primary education cycle, an objective-oriented curriculum framework, the specification of grade-level learning outcomes, the introduction of optional subjects, and the initiation of curriculum dissemination initiatives.

However, the analysis also underscored several critical concerns, such as persistently low student achievement levels and issues surrounding the feasibility and clarity of the learning outcomes owing to their ambiguous formulation (Shah, 2020). Furthermore, the curriculum lacked explicit guidelines regarding the weighting of content areas and failed to promote the integration of relevant content across different subjects. The involvement of local communities and stakeholders at the grassroots level remained minimal. Additional shortcomings included the absence of a structured, ongoing mechanism for curriculum review and enhancement, insufficient utilization of optional subjects at the local level, and reports indicating that approximately 20 to 30 percent of teachers did not have access to the prescribed curriculum materials (Singh, 2012). In light of these findings, the master plan advocated for the continuation of a nationally standardized curriculum policy, the initiation of a continuous process for curriculum development and improvement, the broad expansion of the Curriculum Dissemination Programme, the alignment of teacher training with curricular requirements, and the establishment of a comprehensive school evaluation system as an integral component of the curriculum development framework.

The BPEP-I evaluation report emphasized that the comprehensive nationwide implementation of the primary education curriculum, alongside the production of new textbooks, teachers' guides, and extensive curriculum dissemination initiatives, laid the foundation for a coherent and standardized framework for primary education throughout Nepal (Shrestha et al., 1999). The report further delineated the curriculum's principal attributes, including explicitly articulated terminal objectives at each grade level, overarching educational goals for the entire primary cycle, a meticulously structured scope and sequence categorized by subject area, and the provision for optional subjects.

The Education for All National Plan of Action (MOES, 2003) set forth a comprehensive mandate to revise and strengthen the curriculum with several pivotal objectives: to render the school curriculum more practical and pertinent to daily life, thereby addressing the diverse learning requirements of both youth and adults through equitable access to appropriate educational and life skills programs; to embed progressive gender perspectives within the curriculum and instructional materials to foster enduring gender equity; and to explicitly delineate learning outcomes within the curriculum and textbook revision processes. In alignment with these directives, the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) has methodically integrated these priorities into the primary education curriculum, implementing phased revisions commencing in 2005.

To enhance the goal-oriented, practical, contemporary, and contextually relevant nature of school-level education, the curriculum undergoes continuous revision. In this context, taking into account feedback and recommendations from teachers, parents, students, and subject experts; advancements in knowledge, science, and technology; as well as the imperative to balance local needs with global perspectives, it was considered necessary to revise the Primary Education Curriculum of 2062, originally developed and implemented in 1990 with periodic updates for Grades 1-3. Consequently, a revised curriculum for Grades 1-3 under the basic education level has been developed.

Amidst this process, the political movement of 2006 resulted in the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a republican system in Nepal. In alignment with the guiding principles and structural provisions outlined in the National Curriculum Framework 2019, formulated for the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, and considering the aforementioned contextual dynamics, the curriculum for Grades 1-3 at the

basic level was developed in 2019. This curriculum has been designed in accordance with the strategic directions set forth in the National Curriculum Framework 2019, with the objective of fostering the holistic development of children, promoting social justice, and cultivating competent and competitive citizens capable of contributing to national development. Its formulation further reflects consideration of global educational innovations, Nepal's contemporary socio-political context, and the specific needs of local communities. The integrated curriculum for Grades 1-3 was developed through collaborative workshops involving teachers, experts, and specialists. Based on input from subject committees, a draft was prepared in 2018, piloted in Grade 1 in 2019, and revised using feedback from the pilot. It was approved by the National Curriculum Development and Evaluation Council for nationwide implementation beginning in 2020. The document outlines the rationale for revision, development processes, guiding principles, and the structure of the integrated curriculum (Shah, 2020). It details national educational goals, school education structure, grade-wise competencies (Grades 1-3), subject-specific content, essential life skills, and overall curriculum design. It also covers teaching strategies, assessment methods, medium of instruction, implementation plans, and procedures for evaluation and continuous improvement (Table-1).

Table 1: Curriculum Structure of Basic Education (Grade I-III) 2077 BS

S. N.	Subject	Credit hours	Total
1	Activities related to Linguistic skills development (Nepali)	5	160
2	Activities related to Linguistic skills development (Nepali)	4	128
3	Activities related to mathematical skills development	4	128
4	Knowledge, skills and attitude related to my surrounding (Activities related to Social Studies and Creative Arts, Science and Environment, Health and Physical)	8	256
5	Activities related to Mother Tongue Skill and Local Subjects	5	160
Total		26	832

Source: Curriculum Structure of Basic School (Grade I-III) 2077

The curriculum for Grades 4 and 5 has been developed in alignment with the principles and foundational guidelines set forth in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) of 2019. This framework serves as the cornerstone for shaping school education in Nepal. The curriculum received formal approval from the National Curriculum Development and Evaluation Council in 2020, reflecting a national consensus on its relevance and direction. To ensure its effectiveness and suitability in real classroom settings, the curriculum was piloted in Grade 4 during the 2021/22 academic year. Following these refinements, the revised curriculum was officially implemented nationwide from the 2022/23 academic year. It incorporates the national educational objectives and outlines the structural framework of school education in Nepal. It also defines grade-specific competencies that students are expected to achieve by the end of Grades 4 and 5. In addition, it recommends appropriate pedagogical practices and assessment strategies to enhance the teaching-learning process.

Table 2: Curriculum Structure of Basic Education (Grade IV-V) 2077 BS

S. N.	Subject	Credit hours	Total
1	Nepali	5	160
2	English	5	160
3	Mathematics	5	160
4	Science and Technology	5	160
5	Social studies and Human Value education	5	160
6	Health, Physical and Creative Arts	3	96
7	Mother Tongue and Local Subjects	4	128
Total		32	1024

Source: Curriculum Structure of Basic School (Grade IV-V) 2077

This curriculum for Grades 6-8, developed within the framework of basic education, is grounded in the principles and foundations articulated in the National Curriculum Framework, 2019. It encompasses the national educational goals, the level-wise structural organization of school education, the overall curriculum framework, and the specified competencies for Grades 6-8. Furthermore, it integrates pedagogical approaches and learning facilitation strategies, assessment methods, medium of instruction, plans for curriculum implementation, evaluation, revision, and continuous improvement (Table-3).

Table 3: Curriculum Structure of Basic Education (Grade VI-VIII) 2077 BS

S. N.	General	Sanskrit/Gurukul/ Ved Bidhyasram Education	Gompa/Madrasa Education	Cr	Total
1	Nepali	Nepali	Nepali	5	160
2	English	English or Sanskrit Rachana	English	5	160
3	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics	5	160
4	Science and Technology	Science and Technology or Sanskrit Grammar	Science and Technology	5	160
5	Social studies and Human Value education	Social studies and Human Value education or Kramakanda	Social studies and Human Value education	5	160
6	Health, Physical and Creative Arts	Sanskrit language	Local subject or Buddhist education or Sambhota Grammar or Achar Shuksha or Kuran (Arebic)	3	96
7	Mother Tongue and Local Subjects or Sanskrit Education	Ved or Niti Shastra	Bhot Bhasa or Pali bhasa or sanskrit or other language or Urdu language	4	128
Total				32	1024

Source: Curriculum Structure of Basic School (Grade VI-VIII) 2077

Classroom Pedagogical Activities

he SSRP recommended public exams to be conducted at different levels: Grade 8 at the district level, Grade 10 at the regional level, and Grade 12 nationally. Perspectives on learner-centered teaching vary, ranging from curricula chosen by children themselves to approaches emphasizing active, experiential, and concrete learning. A learner-centered curriculum is also proposed, which honors each child's individuality through differentiated activities, values hands-on experiential learning rooted in constructivist theory, and encourages negotiation with students rather than rigid, top-down mandates (MOE, 2009). It is important to first clearly define the intended pedagogical approaches before outlining the implementation strategy (MOE, 1999). A phased, step-by-step plan focusing on gradual development, building on successes, and scaling up incrementally would be most effective.

A 1989 interim evaluation of the Primary Education Project (PEP) by CERID found that although PEP-trained teachers incorporated more role-playing, demonstrations, and group work, both PEP and non-PEP teachers predominantly relied on direct teaching methods like lectures, questioning, and demonstrations (NCED, 2006). While PEP teachers prepared lesson plans more frequently, both groups mainly depended on textbooks for instruction. Student achievement during the first phase of the Basic Primary Education Project (BPEP) was found to be low. The BPEP-II Master Plan (1997-2002) suggested two possible reasons: either the new curriculum was not delivered properly, or it was insufficiently implemented. The Master Plan highlighted the classroom delivery of curriculum as a critical issue, stressing that meaningful learning requires an integrated teaching approach rather than rote memorization. Learning should involve assimilating new knowledge into existing cognitive frameworks, creating a coherent understanding rather than isolated facts.

An evaluation report of BPEP-I (Shrestha et al., 1999) noted significant progress in planning, curriculum and textbook development, teacher training, and capacity building at the central level. However, weaknesses were identified in resource center and school-level preparation and implementation. The report criticized the excessive focus on peripheral activities and formalities, with insufficient attention to children's actual learning and acquisition of practical knowledge and skills (National Indigenous People Foundation, 2006). Overall, despite some advances, BPEP-II did not produce a noticeable improvement in classroom learning or student achievement. Acharya (2002) further observed that classrooms often featured passive students burdened by excessive content and stressed by unhealthy competition over grades.

The Education for All National Plan of Action (MOES, 2003), based on objectives from the Dakar Forum, established six primary goals. Among these, three explicitly emphasize the quality of education, with one goal specifically focusing on enhancing classroom teaching and learning practices. The 'Concept Paper for Further Support on Basic and Primary Education in Nepal 2004-2009' (MOES, 2002) highlighted the necessity to move away from rote memorization and to recognize the diversity of learners, rather than treating students as a uniform group. Curriculum and educational resources are developed to promote active, child-centered learning through diverse teaching methods. Teachers use a variety of formal and informal assessment tools to evaluate students, enabling them to identify individual strengths and weaknesses. This approach allows educators to tailor their instruction to meet the unique needs of each student, thereby improving the overall quality of learning.

Child-centered education has been established as a foundational vision and strategic priority for enhancing the quality of education. A critical emerging focus within classroom

pedagogy is the provision of education that accommodates diversity. Nepal's unique geographical and cultural landscape - ranging from the southern Terai plains bordering India to the northern Himalayan peaks bordering China - reflects significant environmental and topographical variation. According to the 2001 population census, the country comprises 101 caste groups, 92 linguistic groups, and 10 religious communities, highlighting its rich cultural diversity (DOE, 2003). The Interim Constitution of Nepal formally recognizes this diversity, enshrining provisions such as the right of each community to receive basic education in their mother tongue, as stipulated by law (MOES, 2008). The commitment to delivering quality primary education has been reiterated consistently across successive projects and programs, with a progressive refinement in defining quality in relation to children's learning outcomes. Nevertheless, empirical evidence from studies on classroom practices in Nepal suggests that substantial improvements remain necessary, indicating that the enhancement of teaching methodologies and learning environments is an ongoing challenge.

The Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) framework, School Sector Reform Program (SSRP), and Education for All (EFA) documents emphasize the importance of adopting innovative, active, child-centered, and activity-based teaching methods in classrooms. These pedagogical goals are expected to be clearly articulated in the curriculum and further detailed in curricular materials, teacher training, and assessment strategies. A review of the curriculum reveals that it reiterates the intentions outlined in these policy documents (Paudel, 2011). However, while the curriculum uses terminology aligned with these goals, it lacks explicit guidelines on the specific teaching methods needed to achieve them. To effectively implement these pedagogical approaches, curricular resources and teacher training programs must provide clearer, more practical instructions.

At the classroom level, these pedagogical intentions often remain vague and disconnected from concrete teaching themes such as child-centered learning, reflective practice, collaborative learning, and critical thinking. One contributing factor to the persistence of lecture-based, teacher-centered instruction is that teacher preparation programs focus more on content knowledge than on developing instructional skills. Recent studies (FOE, 2011; Goreto Nepal, 2011) have found that teachers tend to replicate the teaching styles they experienced during their own education, often defaulting to lectures regardless of the range of teaching methods recommended in curricula. To address this, teacher education programs need to prioritize skill development through modeling, practical application, and reflective discussions. Demonstrations of effective methods followed by debriefing sessions are essential for cultivating these skills.

An additional concern regarding the limited range of teaching-learning strategies utilized by student teachers stems from the curriculum's narrow scope and lack of methodological diversity. Traditional instructional methods - including lectures, discussions, inquiry, projects, inductive and deductive reasoning, team teaching, question-and-answer, observation, simulation, and case studies - have dominated teaching methods courses for over two decades (Singh, 2012). However, contemporary pedagogical approaches such as reflective practice, cooperative learning, problem-solving, and critical thinking are noticeably absent. Despite national education policies and programs emphasizing learner-centered teaching (LCT), these approaches have yet to be integrated into the B.Ed. teaching methods curriculum. Consequently, curriculum revisions must prioritize the inclusion of updated content that aligns with current educational demands (Shah, 2020).

It is essential to acknowledge that no single instructional strategy can effectively address all learning types or accommodate every learner's style. As Joyce and Weil (1980) emphasize, varied forms of learning necessitate diverse teaching methods, and learners bring unique preferences that require multiple pedagogical approaches. Therefore, teacher preparation programs should encompass a wide array of teaching strategies. Presently, teacher training materials from institutions such as FOE and NCED lack organization of teaching strategies into coherent thematic clusters (Singh, 2012). Structuring related pedagogical methods into clusters would enhance theoretical comprehension and facilitate skill development. While it may not be feasible to practice every strategy, focusing on selected methods within a thematic cluster can foster a deeper understanding of the broader range of instructional approaches (Shah, 2020; Shah, 2013).

Classroom Setting

Core Document of The Education for All (EFA) 2004-2009 highlighted a lack of clear understanding and defined standards regarding education quality (MOES, 2003). It aimed to conceptualize quality based on expectations at the student, teacher, classroom, school, and community levels (Singh, 2012). EFA envisioned a child, by 2015, as curious, motivated to learn, and possessing knowledge comparable to global peers. For classrooms, EFA projected a stimulating and inclusive learning environment that nurtures every student's potential. Specific recommendations included at least 0.75 sq. meters of space per child, a maximum of 25 students in Grade I and 30 in Grades II-V, flexible furniture, and effective classroom layouts (Singh, 2012). It also emphasized the use of diverse teaching aids, availability of reading materials, designated learning corners, regular display of student work, and essential resources like computers, libraries, and science labs in every primary school.

The EFA framework emphasized student-centered learning, viewing teachers as facilitators of active, engaging classrooms. It promoted a diverse curriculum with 20% localized content focused on life skills, problem-solving, and community learning. Teachers were expected to use innovative methods, stay updated, address individual needs, and foster critical thinking (NCED, 2000). Assessment was continuous and varied, using formal/informal tools and supporting weaker learners, with a criterion-referenced system aiming for all primary students to meet national learning goals. Teachers were envisioned as well-qualified professionals employing effective, flexible teaching strategies to deepen student understanding. They were to create tailored learning experiences and encourage critical thinking, helping students become curious, self-motivated learners with knowledge and skills comparable to international peers.

The Child Friendly School for Quality Education Framework (CFSQEF) was officially endorsed on November 9, 2010, aiming to define, promote, and guide the implementation of child-friendly schools (CFS). It outlines the concept of CFS, key components, and practical guidelines for schools. A CFS is described as a learning space where children can learn joyfully, at their own pace and ability, with respect for their interests and needs. The framework sets minimum and expected standards for classroom and instructional settings. A classroom should be a distraction-free, inclusive environment designed for interaction among students and with the teacher (MOEC, 1991). Teachers are expected to be skilled in seating arrangements, positive language use, individualized support, and non-punitive approaches. Learning spaces - both indoor and outdoor - are viewed as active contributors to the learning process, sometimes referred to as a "third teacher." They should be flexible and engaging, with adaptable furniture that supports diverse activities. While the

framework doesn't prescribe specific seating layouts, it emphasizes adequate space and infrastructure. The minimum requirement is one classroom per 50 students, with the ideal being one per 40. Space allocation should be at least 0.75 m² per student, ideally 1 m², to ensure comfort, mobility, and safety.

For grades 1 to 3, the minimum requirement is mats and cushions for floor seating, with the preferred standard adding carpets for more comfort. Basic furniture includes one desk and bench per four students, while ideally each student has an ergonomic chair and table. Furniture should be age-appropriate, lightweight, and modular, with desks at least 15 inches wide, preferably 18 inches. Classroom displays must showcase student work and instructional materials (Singh, 2012). Minimum standards require a 5x8 ft. blackboard and one display board, while the ideal includes a whiteboard, four display boards, and a mix of low-cost and electronic learning resources. Curriculum materials should be visible on walls, complemented by technology, with a book rack as minimum and subject-specific learning corners recommended. Instructional settings include classrooms, labs, or outdoor spaces designed for interactive and discovery-based learning. Teacher responsibilities focus on detailed lesson planning and delivery. At minimum, teachers prepare annual lesson plans; ideally, these are implemented with ongoing assessment, weekly and daily plans aligned to goals, and achievement targets set. Teachers are expected to consistently apply trained pedagogical skills, with regular supervision to ensure quality and professional development (CERID, 2007).

The government's seven-year School Sector Reform Program (SSRP), launched in 2009, aims to unify Nepal's fragmented school system into basic education (grades 1-8) and secondary education (grades 9-12). Covering 2009/10 to 2013/14, SSRP builds on earlier initiatives like Education for All (EFA) and Teacher Education Project (TEP), introducing reforms to improve education quality, restructure the system, and institutionalize accountability. It prioritizes expanding access to out-of-school children while enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. Rooted in the EFA National Plan of Action and other policy documents, SSRP guides annual strategic and operational plans. Key values such as the right to education, gender parity, inclusion, and equity underpin its strategies (CERID, 2003). Quality improvement focuses on enabling conditions, curriculum, textbooks, and instructional processes. Teacher preparation is a top priority to ensure educators have the skills to support effective student learning. SSRP promotes mother tongue instruction in early grades, bans physical punishment, implements continuous assessment with no grade repetition, raises pass marks to 50%, and encourages multiple textbooks, ICT use, local curricula, and remedial support. Teachers are expected to be knowledgeable, skilled, and flexible, using child-friendly, gender-responsive, and inclusive methods. They should also model positive behavior. Students are envisioned as engaged learners with basic ICT and life skills, appreciating cultural diversity, democracy, sustainable development, and global issues, fostering creativity and self-esteem (CERID, 2004).

This section reviews key documents - the Child-Friendly School (CFS) framework, Education for All (EFA), and School Sector Reform/Program (SSR/SSRP) - that shape pedagogical practices in Nepalese primary classrooms (CERID, 1990). It summarizes standards for classroom and instructional settings, covering student numbers, space, seating, furniture, instructional materials, and displays to improve teaching quality (CERID, 2002). Classroom standards vary: CFS and SSR/SSRP recommend 40 students per class; EFA sets lower limits (25 in Grade I, 30 in Grades II-V). Space allocation is 1 sq.

meter per student in CFS/SSR, and 0.75 sq. meters in EFA. CFS specifies a 40:1 student-teacher ratio. Seating differs - CFS favors individual furniture, SSR/SSRP shared desks, and EFA flexible arrangements. Writing surfaces range from whiteboards to chalkboards (Singh, 2012). Display boards and instructional resources vary similarly, with CFS including electronic materials and subject-specific learning spaces. Instructionally, all emphasize interactive, learner-centered methods: CFS highlights discovery and innovation; SSR/SSRP adds facilitation, continuous assessment, mother tongue use, and local curricula; EFA promotes experiential learning. Teaching methods are child-centered and inclusive across frameworks, with roles for teachers involving planning, assessment, and innovative delivery. SSR/SSRP focuses on democratic values and ICT skills; EFA envisions globally aware, curious learners. Collectively, these frameworks promote an inclusive, flexible, and learner-focused education that supports effective teaching and holistic student growth (CERID, 1989)

Instructional Materials

The Classroom - Friendly School (CFS) framework, SSRP, and EFA emphasize the importance of instructional materials and classroom resources for effective teaching and learning. Both pre-service and in-service teacher training heavily focus on using low-cost or no-cost materials (Singh, 2012). Adequate resources - including people, buildings, equipment, and materials - are essential, as their quality and quantity directly affect classroom activities (Pollard, 2006). Proper organization of these resources, considering factors like appropriateness, availability, storage, and maintenance, is equally critical. However, lacking expensive materials should not be an excuse for poor teaching quality. For instance, effective science education requires hands-on observation and experimentation, which depend on access to suitable facilities and materials (Shah, 2020).

UNESCO (1962) highlighted that science education worldwide has often been hindered by a shortage of necessary materials. It challenged the misconception that laboratory teaching requires expensive, commercially produced equipment. To address this, UNESCO's *Source Book for Science Teaching* promoted developing experimental materials at the local or school level. Collaborative learning approaches (Udvari-Solner & Kluth, 2008; Crawford et al., 2005) emphasize leveraging students' own experiences as valuable learning resources, allowing them to share and learn from one another. This strategy can help offset material shortages in classrooms. It is crucial to train teachers in a prioritized manner: first, to effectively use students' experiences as teaching tools and encourage peer interaction; second, to utilize no-cost materials gathered by teachers and students; third, to select affordable materials that can be crafted locally; and finally, to acquire necessary materials from the market within the school's budget.

Classroom displays are widely acknowledged as important instructional resources. These displays consist of carefully organized visual materials, typically arranged on walls or horizontal surfaces, intended to communicate key information or concepts related to the lesson content (Cohen et al., 1996). Such displays may include students' work, stimulus materials, and relevant resources aligned with the ongoing curriculum. The primary objectives of classroom displays are to stimulate student interest and curiosity (motivational), enhance comprehension throughout the instructional unit (developmental), and consolidate the essential ideas of the topic.

Despite the emphasis placed on the use of classroom displays in educational policy documents, field observations during this study revealed that many classrooms either lacked displays entirely or featured displays used primarily for decorative purposes rather

than pedagogical effectiveness. Furthermore, where displays were present, they often appeared unplanned and inconsistent. Pollard (2006) underscores the importance of considering design, functionality, purpose, quality, and practicality in the effective implementation of classroom displays to create a conducive learning environment. Therefore, it is imperative to provide educators with the necessary training and support to manage and utilize classroom displays as meaningful instructional tools rather than superficial embellishments.

The interim evaluation of the Primary Education Project (PEP) conducted by CERID in 1989 found that PEP schools had more teaching materials than non-PEP schools, and the supplementary materials provided were beneficial. However, the report also highlighted issues such as improper use of these materials, with many books left unused and gathering dust in head teachers' offices or shelves. Additionally, there was a lack of clear guidelines on how, when, and for which lessons the instructional materials should be used. The BPEP-II Master Plan (1997-2002) noted that the new curriculum materials had been developed through a systematic process involving preparation, testing, revision, and refinement before full implementation (Shah, 2020). Efforts were also made to ensure that all necessary curriculum materials were available at the primary school level. The Thematic Reports (MOES, 2003) highlighted a severe lack of supplementary reading materials for both students and teachers in nearly all primary schools. To address this, improvements in the curriculum, textbooks, and instructional resources were planned to make learning more practical and relevant to real life. The Education for All National Plan of Action (MOES, 2003) emphasized the need for schools to be equipped with materials developed by the CDC to support teachers in delivering the curriculum effectively. Adequate supplies of textbooks, teacher's guides, teacher-created materials, and other resources were deemed crucial for successful teaching.

Medium of Instruction

The BPEP-II Master Plan (1997-2002) highlighted that curriculum relevance is closely linked to providing education in students' mother tongues. It also noted challenges arising from the diverse composition of communities, which complicates tailoring instruction and developing curriculum materials in various mother tongues, many of which exist primarily as spoken languages. The Education for All National Plan of Action (MOES, 2003) emphasized the importance of guaranteeing indigenous peoples and linguistic minorities the right to receive quality basic and primary education in their native languages, recognizing the country's ethnic, social, and linguistic diversity. Additionally, the 1990 Constitution of Nepal acknowledges this cultural and linguistic diversity, supporting the provision of education in children's mother tongues (MOES, 2003). A study by the National Indigenous People Foundation (2005) examined school curricula from the perspective of indigenous communities. It recommended using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in primary education, Nepali in lower secondary, and English in secondary levels. The 7th amendment to the Education Act supports the use of mother tongue in primary grades. Additionally, the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) has produced textbooks in various local languages for use in schools. Despite these efforts, several challenges remain, including multilingual community dynamics, a shortage of teachers proficient in local languages, parental preference for languages perceived as more advantageous, and the absence of written scripts for many minority languages (MOES, 2003; CERID, 2005).

Assessment Procedures

Assessment constitutes a fundamental component of the teaching and learning process and has consequently been a focal point in educational planning. The BPEP-II Master Plan (1997-2002) identified the detrimental effects of prevailing examination practices, noting that a substantial portion of instructional time is consumed by examination-related activities, with teaching often suspended during external examinations. Typically, assessments occur three times annually and predominantly consist of recall-based items with limited content validity and reliability. Moreover, formative assessment practices are largely absent. To mitigate these challenges, the Master Plan recommended the development of comprehensive assessment manuals for teachers, the provision of targeted training and orientation, the establishment of national achievement benchmarks, a shift towards criterion-referenced assessments, the implementation of automatic promotion policies for Grade 1, continuous internal assessment protocols, individualized student support, and the specification of minimum achievement standards. The Programme Implementation Plan (1999-2004) further underscored the importance of continuous assessment in enhancing educational quality, advocating for the integration of a Continuous Assessment System (CAS) within a cohesive pedagogical framework.

CAS was piloted during the BPEP-II period. Throughout the Education for All (EFA) initiative, emphasis was placed on CAS, portfolio maintenance, homework management, establishing national performance norms around an 'A' level for all primary students, implementing criterion-referenced assessments, adopting a liberal promotion policy, and expanding assessment to include attitudinal and behavioral dimensions (MOES, 2003). However, the CAS pilot was found to be ineffective (CDC, 2003). These efforts to enhance student assessment were reaffirmed in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) of 2005 and the School Sector Reform (SSR) of 2008. Additionally, these documents emphasized the development of standardized tests, the use of assessment results for curriculum improvement, and the introduction of public examinations at national, regional, and district levels.

Physical Infrastructure of Basic Schools

The Primary Education Project (PEP), launched in September 1984 in six Nepalese districts, aimed to enhance school infrastructure with 40% financial and technical support from the project and 60% from the community. An interim evaluation by CERID in 1986, published in 1989, found PEP schools superior to non-PEP schools in those districts. However, about half of PEP schools lacked compound walls, 56% had insufficient furniture, and classroom shortages hindered smooth instruction. The report concluded that while PEP school buildings were generally in better condition, inadequate classrooms and furniture still impacted teaching quality.

The Basic Primary Education Project I (BPEP-I), implemented from 1992 to 1998, developed standardized designs for school buildings, toilets, furniture, and rehabilitation plans across Nepal's three ecological regions. Classrooms were designed for better ventilation, lighting, and space, with a minimum of 0.75 square meters per student. Bench sizes varied by grade to suit younger and older pupils. An evaluation in 1999 found that about two-thirds of primary schools in the 40 project districts improved their physical facilities significantly, but much work remained nationwide.

The BPEP Phase II Master Plan (1997-2002) highlighted a lack of reliable data on school conditions and aimed to build 6,500 classrooms in Phase I districts and 10,000 in Phase II districts. The 1999 implementation plan noted that 0.75 sq. m. per pupil was minimal, and many schools still lacked sanitation, water, gardens, and fences-important for a motivating

learning environment. A 2001 technical report found no new classrooms were built by 2000, though 70.8% of rehabilitation targets were met, and water, toilet, and fence targets reached only 15.7%. However, Japan International Cooperation Agency fully achieved its classroom, toilet, and water supply targets.

During BPEP-II, Nepal developed the "Education for All National Plan of Action, 2001-2015," which focused on improving educational facilities through school mapping, construction, rehabilitation, and providing libraries, computers, and laboratories. Key goals included maintaining class sizes of 25-30 in grade one and 30-35 in other primary grades, ensuring a minimum of 0.75 sq. m. classroom space per student, supplying two computers per primary school, and establishing libraries and science labs in all primary schools. The Department of Education reported progress in infrastructure development by 2006.

Minimum enabling conditions for effective learning include a teacher-student ratio of 1:40 and class sizes capped at 40 students. Basic education requires one square meter of space per student, and secondary education 1.25 square meters. Each grade must have a dedicated, well-equipped classroom with ventilation, writing boards, desks, benches, and a book corner. Essential facilities include a sturdy roof, boundary walls, at least one toilet, playground, drinking water, office, library, laboratory, and primary care room. All students should have textbooks, curriculum materials, and teacher guides. Multi-grade schools must have suitable classrooms, materials, and trained teachers following guidelines (Meredith, & Steele, 2011).

Financing of Basic Education

Nepal's shift to a federal system has significantly reshaped the education sector, altering the governance and financing of basic and secondary education. This transition has affected the implementation of the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) 2016-2021, which aligns with SDG 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education. Developed prior to the federal restructuring in 2018, the SSDP initially operated under a centralized model, with funding managed by the Ministry of Education through 77 district offices. These offices distributed grants based on student and teacher numbers, along with fixed allocations for operational costs. With local governments now overseeing school management and financing, the federal system requires revised funding mechanisms and updated procedures for fund allocation, utilization, and reporting (Innovative Forum for Community Development, 2004).

In the context of Nepal's evolving federal structure, ensuring adequate financing for education has become increasingly complex. The federal governance model demands that the federal, provincial, and local governments respect their constitutionally assigned roles, powers, and autonomy, while also fostering strong intergovernmental coordination. This coordination is especially critical in the area of fiscal governance, where structured mechanisms are essential to manage resource distribution and accountability across tiers of government. Given Nepal's ongoing transition towards federalism - marked by political, institutional, and systemic realignments - the implementation of education financing policies has revealed various tensions, overlaps, and inconsistencies. These challenges highlight the urgent need for continuous refinement of fiscal arrangements and intergovernmental relations. Drawing on the experiences of other federal countries, it becomes evident that sustained, evidence-based policy analysis is vital to ensure that education financing remains equitable and effectively supports national goals of inclusive, quality education for all (Innovative Forum for Community Development, 2007).

From 2011 to 2018, Nepal's education spending grew by 11.4% annually, increasing its share of GDP from 3.8% to 5.2%, while its proportion of the national budget declined from 18% to 14% due to faster growth in other sectors. Public funding mainly supports community schools, excluding private institutions. Per-student expenditure rose at the basic level, driven by declining student numbers with stable teacher counts. Household spending also increased, especially in secondary education, where families funded 66% of total costs by 2019 - reflecting growing private school enrollment. Despite increased government investment, spending per student remains low compared to countries like Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Nepal's challenging geography and dispersed population contribute to higher education delivery costs, highlighting the need for more equitable and adequate funding.

Local governments in Nepal fund their activities through four main sources: local taxes and fees, a share of federal tax revenues, conditional federal grants (including for education), and fiscal equalization grants designed to reduce regional disparities. The Constitution also provides for federal matching and special purpose grants. Local revenues come from taxes on house rent, real estate, land, and service fees like tourism and waste management. Education financing at the local level mainly relies on federal grants, especially fiscal equalization grants - which allocate 15% of value-added tax and excise duty revenues - and federal conditional education grants. These equalization grants are distributed based on fiscal gap (60%), poverty levels (15%), social and economic discrimination (15%), and infrastructure availability (10%).

Under Nepal's federal system, local governments have considerable discretion over their spending decisions. In fiscal year 2019, 55% of local funding came from fiscal equalization grants (including federal tax shares), 37% from conditional grants, and 7% from local revenues. Unconditional funds made up 63%, enabling flexible spending. Despite this, most local governments allocate nearly 89.4% of their education budget from the federal conditional education grant, contributing only about 10.5% from their own resources. Other sources like special grants and international aid account for just 0.2%. Education funding varies widely: about 52% of local governments rely on the conditional grant for over 90% of education spending, while only 3% use 30% or more from alternative sources.

Nepal's local governments - metropolitan, municipal, and rural - rely heavily on federal conditional education grants, which fund about 75% of metropolitan, 70% of municipal, and 87% of rural education expenses. These grants constitute roughly 89% of total local education budgets, averaging 13,809 Nepalese rupees per student, with significant variation across municipalities. Teacher salaries, accounting for 74% of education spending, largely drive the differences in per-student grant allocations, as funding is closely tied to the number of teaching positions in each locality.

In most local governments and schools, teacher allocations do not align with actual student-teacher ratios. Nationally, the student-teacher ratio has dropped significantly in basic education but less so in secondary education. Basic level schools show similar ratios across metropolitan, municipal, and rural areas. However, at the secondary level, metropolitan areas have lower student-teacher ratios compared to municipal and rural areas, likely due to alternative schooling options like private schools.

Breaking down education levels into grades 1-5, 6-8, 9-10, and 11-12 reveals varying student-teacher ratios, with grades 1-5 consistently having more teachers per student across

all local governments. This staffing has not been adjusted despite declining enrollment in early grades due to a shrinking school-age population. Some local governments with high student–teacher ratios in basic education also have similarly high ratios in secondary education. However, federal conditional grants for teacher salaries are based on the total number of teacher positions per local government, without considering actual student – teacher ratios. Although efforts are underway to reassign and train teachers for higher grades, ongoing redeployment, upskilling, and creating new positions for upper grades are needed. These measures will help balance resource allocation per student and promote equitable education funding across local governments.

The current federal conditional grant allocation method does not effectively promote equity in education across local governments, as there are wide disparities in per-student spending even among areas with similar demographics and resources. Since teacher salaries for permanent positions make up the largest expense, variations in grant amounts largely reflect differences in teacher allocations, which often do not adhere to a standardized national student–teacher ratio. To improve service delivery, equity, and quality in basic and secondary education, local governments should be empowered to adopt more efficient strategies for managing and distributing teacher positions using their available resources.

Nepal’s federal system requires local governments to fund their budgets from multiple constitutionally mandated sources: own revenue, shared federal revenues and equalization grants, federal conditional grants, and special grants. The federal conditional education grant is the primary funding source for basic and secondary education, though some local governments supplement it with discretionary revenues like their own income and equalization grants. Currently, the allocation of these federal education grants does not adequately account for variations in local fiscal capacity or the differing costs of providing education due to factors such as location and population density.

Conclusions

In 2006, Nepal transitioned from a monarchy to a federal democratic republic, replacing the centralized governance system with a federal structure. Recognizing the country's multi-ethnic, multilingual, multi-religious, multicultural, and geographically diverse character, the state adopted policies aimed at fostering unity in diversity, socio-cultural cohesion, tolerance, and harmony. These policies are grounded in the principles of proportional inclusion and participatory democracy, with the objective of eliminating class, caste, regional, linguistic, religious, and gender-based discrimination, and establishing an egalitarian society that ensures economic equity, prosperity, and social justice. Despite the progressive commitments stated in various educational policies and legal documents, there remains a significant gap between the theoretical intentions and the actual practices observed in classrooms. While policies emphasize learner-centered pedagogy, inclusive education, and decentralization, these principles are often not translated effectively into day-to-day teaching and learning. This discrepancy undermines the intended reforms and reflects a broader issue of weak implementation mechanisms and insufficient teacher training in pedagogical innovations. One of the critical areas where this disconnect is evident is curriculum development. Although decentralization is encouraged in policy discourse, in practice, curriculum design and content selection remain largely centralized. Local needs, linguistic diversity, and community contexts are often overlooked. As a result, the curriculum may not align with the lived realities of learners, especially those from marginalized or remote communities. This centralized approach limits contextual

adaptation and hinders the responsiveness of the education system to local educational demands.

In terms of pedagogy, the teacher-centered model still dominates classroom instruction. Traditional methods such as rote memorization, lecture-based teaching, and textbook dependency continue to prevail. This contrasts sharply with the learner-centered strategies advocated in policy, which encourage critical thinking, collaboration, and experiential learning. Teachers often lack the necessary professional development, pedagogical support, and resources to shift towards more interactive and inclusive teaching methods. This results in passive learning environments where students are not actively engaged in the construction of knowledge. Furthermore, the physical and technological environment of schools, particularly in remote and underserved areas, significantly limits the effectiveness of education. Many classrooms are overcrowded, with poor ventilation and lighting, making it difficult to maintain a conducive learning atmosphere. Seating arrangements are often inadequate, with a lack of appropriate desks and benches, forcing students to sit in uncomfortable or crowded conditions. Moreover, the availability of educational resources such as visual aids, interactive materials, and digital tools is extremely limited. In the absence of technology-friendly infrastructure, schools are unable to implement modern, ICT-based pedagogies that could enhance learning outcomes.

These structural and infrastructural challenges have a direct impact on student learning. When classrooms are uninspiring and under-resourced, both teachers and students struggle to maintain motivation and engagement. The lack of engaging teaching materials and interactive approaches hinders the development of essential cognitive and social skills among students. Moreover, inequities in educational access and quality persist, particularly affecting children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Although Nepal's educational policies are progressive in nature, their translation into classroom practice is hindered by systemic, pedagogical, and infrastructural limitations. Addressing this gap requires concerted efforts in teacher capacity building, decentralization of curriculum development, investment in educational infrastructure, and effective monitoring mechanisms to ensure policy implementation aligns with ground realities.

Following the political transformation of 2006, educational reforms in Nepal sought to initiate corresponding changes at the school level. However, the anticipated improvements have not been fully achieved. Although the policy emphasizes the use of mother tongues as the medium of instruction at the basic level, Nepali and English continue to dominate classroom instruction. This discrepancy has adversely affected the learning process and motivation of children whose first language is not reflected in the medium of instruction.

The political transformation of 2006 in Nepal, marked by the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a federal democratic republic, brought with it the hope of inclusive and progressive reforms across all sectors, including education. In line with this broader transformation, educational reforms aimed to restructure the school system to make it more equitable, inclusive, and reflective of the country's sociolinguistic diversity. One of the key policy provisions was the promotion of mother tongues as the medium of instruction at the basic education level, particularly in early grades. This policy was rooted in global research and local advocacy suggesting that children learn best when taught in their first language, especially in the foundational years. However, despite these policy intentions, the actual practice in schools tells a different story. In most classrooms across Nepal, Nepali and English continue to be the dominant languages of instruction. This is

especially true in urban and semi-urban schools and is increasingly the case even in rural settings. Parents and educators often perceive Nepali and English as languages of upward mobility, better employment opportunities, and social prestige, which reinforces their preference in formal education, despite policy mandates to the contrary.

The continuation of Nepali and English as primary instructional languages has created significant barriers for children whose first language is different - such as speakers of Maithili, Tamang, Tharu, Limbu, and dozens of other indigenous languages. When these children enter school, they are immediately confronted with a language they may not understand, which makes it difficult for them to grasp basic concepts, express themselves, or participate actively in classroom activities. This linguistic gap often results in low academic performance, frustration, and a lack of confidence, which in turn leads to reduced motivation and, in some cases, early dropout. In essence, the mismatch between language policy and classroom practice undermines the very goals of inclusion and equity that the 2006 reforms aimed to achieve. For education to truly serve as a vehicle for social justice in Nepal, it is essential that the language of instruction reflects the linguistic realities of the learners. This requires not only policy enforcement but also teacher training, development of multilingual learning materials, and a shift in societal attitudes toward the value of mother-tongue education.

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