



MONASH University

**Exploring the Tensions Between Policy and Practice: A
Case Study of Nepali Secondary School Teachers and
Leaders' Interpretation of the National Curriculum
Framework's Learner-Centred Reform Policy**

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Abstract

Nepal is in the process of transforming its school education system to promote learner-centred pedagogies and outcomes. To do so, it implemented a decisive curriculum reform policy called the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) in 2007. However, since the introduction of the NCF, few studies have documented how practitioners have implemented this curriculum reform. Using a qualitative case study method, this research sought to understand how Nepali secondary school teachers and leaders interpreted the NCF's learner-centred reform policy into practice. The study involved typical government secondary schools in Kathmandu. Two school leaders, and four teachers participated in the study. The study's findings revealed that teachers and school leaders failed to implement learner-centred education reform with fidelity and the tension between policy and practice was evident; many of the teachers dismissed the reform policy because of constraining classroom realities. Learner-centred education was deemed by the participants as a 'Western' imposition that did not fit the Nepali cultural value and belief system. Many of the school leaders participating in the study were unable to hold their teachers accountable as the sector was highly politicised. The study highlighted the importance of a policy being contextually relevant, appropriate and owned by practitioners. It adds to the growing body of literature that emphasises the importance of how policies cannot simply be imported but rather how important it is to carefully craft a policy in line with the local context of the country.

Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Definition of Key Terms

National Curriculum Framework (NCF): A policy that was implemented in 2007. It aimed to restructure the Nepali education system and transform learning to deliver a more holistic and learner-centred education.

Learner-centred education (LCE): LCE is associated with progressive education, problem-based learning, enquiry driven education, constructivism, child-centred learning and student-centred education/learning (Lattimer, 2015). For the purposes of this research LCE entails: 1) Teachers acting as facilitators of the learning process rather than being an authority; 2) Rigid content driven curriculum being replaced by a flexible locally relevant syllabus; 3) Students being given individual attention and encouraged to question and critically engage in the learning process; 4) Lessons being designed to meet the interests of the learners; 5) A variety of teaching techniques and pedagogies being used to ensure that students acquire the necessary skills, and 6) High stakes examinations being replaced by assessment systems that continuously monitor student progress (Lattimer, 2015; Schweisfurth, 2013; Song, 2015).

Classroots Realities: The contextual realities in which teachers are expected to implement reforms (O'Sullivan, 2002). These include physical infrastructure and the personal and professional contexts in which these reforms are initiated. Along with this, teachers' culture, beliefs, values, adaptability, openness and perception towards the recommended policies also directly influence the plausibility of effective implementation (O'Sullivan, 2002).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Formal education in Nepal is instrumental to achieving social and economic development (Ministry of Education, 2016; Pherali, 2011; Pherali & Garratt, 2014; Parajuli and Wagley, 2010). Consequently, the Government of Nepal prioritised the reform of the education sector through multiple education reform policies over the last twenty years (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2016). These initiatives have taken place in close coordination with aid organisations which have assisted the country to prepare education plans and policies in accordance with global targets (Bhatta, 2011). Additionally, this collaboration with aid organisations resulted in the country adopting global educational models and activities (Bhatta, 2011) such as ‘Education for All’ (EFA). In spite of some positive responses to these developments, there are concerns that these changes have removed teachers from reform activities central to their work (Awasthi, 2004; Bhatta, 2011).

Despite all the efforts made by the Nepali government to improve the education system, schools continue to struggle to meet basic learning standards (Ministry of Education, 2016). The diverse backgrounds of students, both socially and economically, remain a challenge; data shows that only 12 percent of the children from the lowest wealth quintile are developmentally on track in literacy and numeracy compared to the 65% from the highest wealth quintile (UNICEF, 2019). Schools also report an uneven distribution of resources and high dropout rates (Caddell, 2007; Carney & Bista, 2009). Statistics published by UNICEF show that 770,000 students between the age of 5-12 are still out of school. Additionally, organisations (Teach for Nepal, 2016) and national newspapers (Republica, 2016) claim that only about 30% of students who enroll in grade 1 complete grade 12 in Nepal. The poor quality of education is further exacerbated by the lack of accountability and transparency caused by the politicisation of teachers and school management (Mathema, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2009, 2016; Ministry of Education & UNESCO, 2015; Pherali, 2013). The

reforms resulted in negligible changes in classroom practices (NORAD, 2009). In all, the development of modern education in Nepal has led to “deeper inequality and a sense of a profound inner confusion” (Carney & Rappleye, 2011, p. 2).

One such reform initiative was the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) developed by the Ministry of Education’s Curriculum Development Center in 2007. The NCF, was a decisive document as it outlined the future plan of the ministry, transforming the education system into one that is inclusive and learner-centred (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). By implementing learner-centred education, the NCF aimed to strengthen the education system by enabling the learners to be an active part of the learning process (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). Consequently, the education system would then be able to “generate productive, creative, qualitative, nationalistic, employment-oriented and globally competitive citizens.”(Ministry of Education. Curriculum Development Center, 2007, p. 7). The policy encompassed policies, parameters and guidelines on curricular and other aspects of education (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). The document served as a managerial and administrative resource as well as a teaching handbook for teachers and school leaders (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2005, 2007). The NCF was created in consultation with representatives from donor organisations, education experts, teachers, and school leaders (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). Since the introduction of the NCF, very few studies have explored how teachers and school leaders perceive and implement the curriculum reforms in order to achieve a learner-centred education (Bajracharya & Brouwer, 1997; Bhattarai & Gautam, 2005; Carney, 2003; Tin, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of how Nepali secondary school teachers and leaders implemented the NCF to achieve learner-centred education. This research focused on their perceptions, understandings, and practices in translating the proposed recommendations in their schools and classrooms. The following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. How have Nepali secondary school leaders and teachers interpreted the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) policy of learner-centred education in their work?
2. What insights do these views provide policymakers for improving curriculum reform implementation in Nepali secondary schools?

Context of the Study

To help the reader understand the context of the study, I will now discuss the social and political history and the evolution of school education in Nepal.

Social and Political History of Nepal

Nepal is a land-locked country nestled between India and China. Although recognised around the world for its mountains, particularly Mount Everest, Nepal's topography is diverse. Politically, Nepal has never been colonised. It was a monarchy for about 240 years under the rule of the Shah dynasty (Levine, 1987). Since 2008, it has been a democratic republic. With a population of about 29 million people, the socio-cultural diversity of Nepal is one of its defining features. According to the 2011 Census, there are 126 caste/ethnic¹

¹ The caste system is a hierarchical system within Hinduism that ascribes the status of 'purity' and 'impurity' to people on the basis of their birth. It broadly consists of the four castes: Brahmin, Chettri, Vaishya and Shudra (this includes Dalits). While the Brahmins are at the top of the hierarchy, the Dalits are at the bottom. Ethnicity is a self-identified status. It is derived from the linguistic, cultural and historical commonalities shared among a group of people. Many ethnic groups in Nepal do not follow Hinduism. In 1958, the National Legal Code (Miluki Ain) sought to create a singular national caste system by uniting groups belonging to the Hindu castes and autonomous ethnicity, namely for the Tibeto-Burmese speaking population and the Tibetan ethnicity (see Hoefer, 1979). They are called Janajatis. Legislation cemented differences between various castes and ethnic groups by prescribing different punishments, economic access in the form of land tenure and trading rights (see Regmi, 1965; Levine, 1987; Gellner, 2007 for a detailed discussion of identity and socio-political access of various castes and ethnicities in Nepal).

groups that speak 123 languages as their mother tongue, 25% of its population live below the poverty line, and the country is heavily dependent on remittance (World Bank Fact Book, 2019). The literacy rate is 63.9% (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011), the majority of its population is Hindu and the second largest religion in the country is Buddhism (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

History of the Education System in Nepal

Nepal's indigenous education system was based on the Vedic learning philosophy (Texts from Hinduism) (Acharya, 1996). There was no centralised education system; rather the various systems were established and supported by communities (Acharya, 1996). Education was oral and teacher centred; the teacher recited information while the learner listened, memorised and recited it back. The teachers exercised absolute authority over the students while the students were expected to be loyal and obedient (Acharya, 1996). To ensure that learning would take place, obedience to teachers was deemed essential, thus teachers were allowed to physically punish students (Acharya, 1996).

Modern Nepal's education system has always been affected by the country's tumultuous political history (Onta, 1996). Schools in the country served as sites where notions of the Nepali state and national identity were either contested or promoted by different groups (Caddell, 2007). Every time the country experienced a political shift, the education system was revised to reflect the incoming regime's vision of the Nepali state and its identity (Onta, 1996). Subsequently, as political parties changed schools became an important medium through which the vision of the new Nepali state was rearticulated (Caddell, 2007).

The country opened its education system to the general public in 1951 (Caddell, 2007). It also allowed international aid organisations to help the country's education policy and planning (Caddell, 2007). During this period, education symbolised modernity and acted

as a hope to help the country overcome one hundred years of oligarchic rule by the Rana Regime (Caddell, 2007). The priority was to make the education system more culturally representative, but Nepali was chosen as the official teaching language (Caddell, 2007). This was the language of the Brahmins and the Chettris and consequently their cultural practices dominated the education system (Gelner, 2007). This gave way to the monarchy dissolving the democratic government and taking over the country in 1960 (Caddell, 2007; Carney & Bista, 2009). This regime focused on creating a single Nepali identity that was enforced as “a particular vision of the nation, that served to legitimise the position and power of the existing political elite both within the country and in the international community” through school education (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1997, p. 435-6). It became mandatory for all schools to start the day singing the national anthem (Onta, 1996). They were also required to hang portraits of the monarchy in the school premises (Caddell, 2007). This resulted in the entrenchment of an education system that propagated the interests of the small elite class without considering how appropriate it was to address the needs of the country (Ragsdale, 1989).

When multiparty democracy was reinstated in 1990 and the king became the constitutional head of the country (Caddell, 2007), educational agendas began to embrace diversity by representing all cultures, castes and ethnicities in the country, and in the curriculum (Caddell, 2007). This opened doors for donor organisations to be more involved in the process of policy drafting and planning to enhance the education system (Caddell, 2007). But underlying conflicts amongst different groups remained, and the government sought to “mediate competing visions of the role of the state whilst striving to maintain the authoritative position of the ruling elite” (Caddell, 2007, p. 20). The Brahmins and the Chettris continued to dominate all public and political spaces (Caddell, 2007). Furthermore, global visions of education such as Education for All and learner-centred education became increasingly explicit in Nepali education policies (Caddell, 2007).

Hindu Influence in Teaching and Learning

Despite the cultural diversity found in Nepal, it is predominantly a Hindu state (Sharma, 2013). Subsequently, educational practices reflect a Hindu philosophy of life (Sharma, 2013). Even though the country embraces Western notions of modern education, they were renegotiated and modified to realign with the underlying Hindu values and traditions of the nation (Sharma, 2013). To begin with, the Hindu concept of learning does not focus on acquiring knowledge in the form of facts and figures, but emphasises developing wisdom by strengthening the connection between the mind, body and the spirit (Thaker, 2007). In many Nepali classrooms, this is evident when teachers talk about students' *dharma* as it applies to themselves and their parents. Learning is twofold in Hinduism. The first aspect is gaining knowledge and understanding of the scriptures through rote learning, memorisation and repetition (Sharma, 2013). The second is that knowledge is a path for self-discovery and to gain an understanding of the universe (Sharma, 2013).

In Hindu tradition, the journey of learning does not take place in an institution but rather in forests and in nature. Teaching takes place communally, although the needs of individual students are still addressed (Sharma, 2013). Learning is viewed as taking place collectively where the more versed students help the new members of the groups (Sharma, 2013). Deemed to possess the highest level of moral and spiritual qualifications, teachers are revered by students and society (Sharma, 2013) and teachers treat students like their own children (Sharma, 2013). Teachers' duties are much greater than simply imparting knowledge. They are expected to help shape the lives of their students (Sharma, 2013).

Cultural Assumptions of Nepali Society

Despite the predominant structural hierarchical inequalities and Hindu influence on education, Nepal remains a collectivist multi-cultural society (Cole et al., 2006). This is because social harmony, conformity, and respect for authority is most valued and often

overrides ethnic and caste tensions present in society (Cole, et al., 2006). Social harmony is further cemented when people in Nepal refer to each other through familial addressal regardless of their ethnic, caste or class status (Cole et al., 2006). This is because there is a strong belief that self is derived from the group and the needs of the group are far greater than that of an individual (Cole et al., 2006). Consequently, the respect for elders and authority is an integral value in society (Cole et al., 2006; Ingersoll-Dayton & Saengtienchai, 1999). In such a climate it is expected that children revere and obey their elders unquestioningly (Goldstein & Beall, 1986). Therefore, it is the duty of the elders to show the right path for children and teach them lessons when they exhibit morally questionable behavior (Goldstein & Beall, 1986). These beliefs are ingrained in Nepali society and are deeply rooted across all ethnicities, castes, religions and class (Cole et al., 2006).

Teachers in Nepal

Despite Nepal's heterogeneous population, education and teaching are influenced by the higher caste/ethnicities, the Brahmins and the Chhettris (Pherali, 2013). However, while the Hindu hierarchical social structure does not represent all groups in Nepali society, teachers and school leaders in the system largely belong to these groups (Karki, 2014; Pherali, 2013). Government statistics show that at the primary level there are only 38.4%, and in secondary schools 21.4% of teachers who belong to other ethnicities, the Janajati and Dalits (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017).

All government schoolteachers work for the Ministry of Education and are employed under permanent or temporary contracts (Ministry of Education, 2005). Teachers under permanent contracts cannot be fired (Ministry of Education, 2005). They must meet minimum requirements as stipulated by the Ministry of Education (Government of Nepal, Law Commission, 2016). The basic primary schoolteachers are required to have at least a Bachelor's degree in any subject and a year of teacher training (Ministry of Education, 2016).

To teach in secondary schools, teachers need a Master's degree in any relevant subject and one year of teacher training (Ministry of Education, 2016). Now it is mandatory for all government teachers to acquire teaching licences (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2009). All teachers working for government schools undergo Teacher Professional Development (TPD). Training is conducted by the Department of Education and donor organisations (Ministry of Education, National Center for Educational Development, 2010). In spite of the new regulations and training opportunities, research reported that trainings were duplicated and fragmented (Ministry of Education, National Center for Educational Development, 2010). Shrestha (2008) affirmed that teachers were not able to implement the training in practice as they were not deemed feasible by the practitioners. However, Subedi (2015) argued that teacher training programs brought about behavioural changes and helped schools deliver higher quality education. Caddell (2005) and Pherali (2011) argued that the teacher training programs failed to change teacher practices. Therefore, despite the government's effort to ensure that teachers meet minimum qualification standards, the trainings and the professional development that teachers are involved in have not brought about the desired outcomes.

Significance of the Study

In the process of reforming the education system of Nepal, national policies, including the NCF, focused on implementing learner-centred approaches to improve the quality standards of the sector (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2016; Ministry of Education, & UNESCO, 2015; Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2009, 2013). However, there is little research that focuses on how teachers and school leaders interpreted learner-centred education into their practices. The data collected in this study will be a contemporary look at the influence and significance of the NCF; as this is an understudied area in the field of Nepali education.

This study is also significant in that it pays close attention to the lived realities of teachers and leaders as they interact with the reforms and interpret them into practice. This study provides an up to date analysis of the teaching realities in Nepali classrooms and schools. This will provide policy makers insights to help improve curriculum reform implementation in Nepal's secondary schools.

Role of the Researcher and Limitations

I am emic to this study because I identify as Nepali. I speak Nepali and understand the cultural nuances and subtleties (Otten & Geppert, 2009; Walkins & Akande, 1994). I was born and raised in Kathmandu. However, I spent a substantial part of my childhood living in different countries in Southern Africa and attended international schools. I attended a prestigious private school in Nepal where I was engaged in an extensive learner-centred education. We were taught to explore and expand our horizons. My learning experience is not a lived reality for the majority of Nepali students.

The study has several limitations which will now be discussed. Firstly, time was a constraint. I only had four and a half weeks to collect the data for this study. School sessions were just about to commence, so it was difficult to gain access to schools. Furthermore, this study's sample is not representative of the different castes and ethnicities present in Nepal and has a stronger female presence. Lastly, this study is limited by its size, with six participants from five institutions in Kathmandu.

Organisation of the Thesis

The dissertation is organised into six chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the key literature on the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and conceptual framework that guided the study. Chapter 3 presents the methodology, a qualitative case study. Chapter 4 gives the findings of the research, which is presented through themes. Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to the literature, while Chapter 6 concludes the thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In developing countries like Nepal, education reform policies are enacted to transform the education sector and address existing structural challenges and inequalities present in the system (Ball, 1998; Bantwini, 2010; Jansen, 1998; Yan, 2012). Many developing countries in the global south borrow ideas from the global north; however, these reforms often fail to produce tangible changes as expected by policy makers (Ball, 1998; Bantwini, 2010; Cohen and Hill, 2001; Brooks, 2005; Fullan 1992; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Gitlin & Margonis, 1995; Supovitz & Weinbaum, 2008; Yan, 2012). Education policies are not “magical solutions,” even though they are proposed to be so or at least perceived as such by some educators and policy makers (Ball, 1998, p. 127).

Education reforms in the global south are often imported or ‘imposed’ from ‘dominant’ developed countries who determine the “important global trends and innovations” in education (Brook Napier, 2005; p. 62). Education reforms imitated through international non-governmental organizations and through bilateral or multilateral aid is criticized for perpetuating the neo-liberal agenda in these developing countries (Lakes & Carter, 2011; Rutkowski, 2007). This is because these organisations work within the framework of neo-liberal economic framework (Apple, 2006; Robert, 2005; Rutkowki, 2007). They push governments to adopt local and national policies that reinforce neo-liberal ideologies and values (Lakes & Carter, 2011; Robert, 2005; Rowkaski, 2007). Consequently, this western influence on education reform policies in developing countries is often referred to as ‘neo-colonialism’ (Nguyen et al., 2009, p. 109; Tikly, 2004). Developing countries in an effort to modernise import education policies and practices that seem to best work in these western contexts without thinking about how it would be received by the country’s local culture and context (Nguyen et al., 2009). ‘Neo-colonialism’ is evident in developing countries education reform agendas because they reflect the interests of western nations (Nguyen et al, 2009;

Tikly 2004). Through education reforms, colonizing countries continue to maintain their dominance over these developing nations through aid and bilateral/multilateral loan (Nguyen et al., 2009; Rizvi, 2004). Consequently, they push for the use of specific pedagogies and education systems as deemed most effective to achieve better learning outcomes (Crossly & Tikly, 2004; Nguyen et al., 2009; Rizvi, 2004).

These reforms are implemented in situations that are complicated by poverty, structural inequality, corruption, politicisation, foreign debt, ethnic tensions, lack of adequate resources, or inadequate supplies of trained teachers and leaders (Brook Napier, 2005, p. 62 and p 71). Despite similar attributes shared by developing countries, each country has its unique situation and therefore school reforms cannot be replicated because what works for one institution may not be applicable in another context (Brooks, 2005).

When reforms are implemented in developing countries, they often have unexpected outcomes, which can cause more harm than good (McLaughlin, 1987). Carney and Bista (2009) assessed the impact of World Bank's initiative of 'transferring' Nepal's government school management to local community stakeholders. Basing their arguments on a genealogical analysis since 1990, Carney and Bista (2009) concluded that the actions of the World Bank had negative consequences that were not anticipated by policy makers (Carney & Bista, 2009). Additionally, even when the concept of community ownership was accepted as a way to decentralise and democratise, it was the elite groups, the Brahmins and the Chhetris who benefitted the most from this handover (Carney & Bista, 2009). Furthermore, it created scope for new power structures, such as local political actors becoming more involved in school management as a façade to pursue their political agendas (Carney & Bista, 2009). Thus, it is important to consider grassroots-led reforms to improve schools (Liou et. al, 2009).

For policies to be effectively implemented, they must be created to match local contexts and be realistic (Dello-Lacovo, 2009). In addition, when education reforms are implemented, careful attention must be paid to the experiences, voices and opinions of practitioners who are responsible for translating such recommendations into practice (Brooks, 2006; Barrett, 2007; Lattimer, 2015; O’Sullivan, 2002; Spillane et al., 2002). Yet many policymakers are still not paying adequate attention to the implementation process (Riddell & Nin˜o-Zarazua, 2016). A central theme of global education reform is transforming curricula, which often brings to light hegemonic power structures, further complicating the reform process (Apple, 2004).

Curricula reform is necessary to bring about changes in education (Gottesman, 2012). When changes are required to education systems, curriculum is the vehicle for this change. There are various definitions of curriculum (Gottesman, 2012; Roofe & Bezzina, 2018) but the most fitting for this study is Roofe & Bezzina’s (2018) definition, which states that curricula:

Leads all core aspects of education that are known to determine quality, inclusion and relevance. It also represents the core of forging social attitudes and skills, such as tolerance and respect, conflict management, gender equality, justice, self-confidence, motivation, while at the same time contributing to the development of thinking skills that learners need to apply to meet the needs of their daily lives (p. 2.).

Curriculum includes both what is formally and informally taught in schools (Jansen, 1998; Penny et al., 2008) and reflects wider societal power structures (Apple, 2004; McLaren, 2000; Freire, 1996). Curriculum is a sociological phenomenon influenced by the values and beliefs of a society (Gottesman, 2012) and consequently its study consists of myriad opinions, ideas, beliefs, conceptual disagreements and is a place where “academic knowledge, subjectivity and society get invigorated” (Pinar, 2012, p.17; Tyler, 2013).

Globalisation also influences how curricula are developed, due to more powerful countries determining what is appropriate knowledge at that point in time (Roofe & Bezzina, 2018; Brook Napier, 2005). At the same time, countries must also negotiate larger global demands with their national level “principles of social and cultural control” (Apple, 2004, p. 2). Therefore, curricula are “political text(s)” (Pinar et al., 1995, p.246). Decisions about curriculum and the meanings built into school curricula are constructed by implicit cultural assumptions, ideologies, and traditions (Brady and Kennedy, 2003; Grenfell & James, 2003), which preserve and distribute cultural capital and reproduces the status quo (Apple, 2004). This hegemony “saturates” individual consciousness, shaping the educational, economic and social world we see and interact with, and the common-sense interpretations we put on it, as it becomes the world *tout court*, the only world, making it central to everyday lived realities (Apple, 2004, p. 4). This study sought to understand how teachers manoeuvre through the hegemonic structures present in the system as they implement their interpretations of NCF’s reforms.

Curricula Reforms in Developing Countries

Curricula reforms in developing countries are a part of wider educational reform agendas (O’Sullivan, 2004). Even though they are well intentioned and planned, they are not always successful (Rogan & Grayson, 2003). The implementation process is ‘messy’ because it requires drastic changes in the entire educational system (Bantwini, 2010, p. 88).

Curriculum reforms demand fundamental changes in how schools are run and managed, lessons are taught, and students are assessed (Margolis & Nagel, 2006; Rogan & Grayson, 2010). Consequently, teachers and school leaders face readjusting and reassimilating their practices (Margolis & Nagel, 2006; Montero-Seiburth, 1992).

Reforms are resisted by practitioners because they are perceived as threats, they might not match the context of the school, or time constraints may hinder assessment and

negotiation of the reforms (Hinde, 2003). When curriculum reforms are implemented, teachers often feel lost and anxious, which is often ignored by policy makers as unjustified (Margolis & Nagel, 2006). Implementation can fail because the proposed changes are too “fragmented” and “uncoordinated” (Fullan & Miles, 1992, p. 745). Additionally, the “hyper-rationalized” solutions proposed by reforms may not yield the expected changes as education exists in complex systems where there are no straightforward solutions (Fullan & Miles, 1992, p. 746; Bantwini, 2010). Another problem with policy implementation is that “symbolic” reforms quickly implemented are viewed as a success; however, often these reforms are implemented to obtain resources, rather than to solve the issue at hand (Fullan & Miles, 1992, p.748). Thus, to avoid the symbolic application of reforms, policy makers should engage in dialogue and allow time for teachers to reflect and find suitable ways to implement appropriate reforms in their contexts (Leithman et al., 2002).

Policy implementation needs to be carefully designed to meet the individual needs of a given context. This involves an ongoing process of negotiation between stakeholders and practitioners, who often interpret the proposed policies through their personal lenses (Bantiwini, 2010; Rogan & Grayson, 2003). This study sought to understand how teachers and school leaders interpreted the NCF’s learner-centred education policy, necessitating an overview of the history of education in Nepal and the country’s most recent curriculum reform policy, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF).

Historical Inequality in the Nepali Education System

Traditionally, education in Nepal was accessible to people belonging to the upper classes and castes and was used as a powerful symbol of status (Karki, 2014). Ragsdale’s (1989) ethnography of schooling in rural Nepal documented the introduction of a new curriculum, full of cultural knowledge that favoured individuals from Kathmandu. This national reform effort reinforced the control of the ruling class, namely the Brahmins and the

Chettris. This did not hinder individuals from the lower class/castes from pursuing education, as they aspired to be more socially mobile (Bista, 1991). However, Bista (1991) claimed that education was not associated with acquiring intellectual powers or technical skills for these individuals; rather, gaining an education was “ritualistic behaviour” that was expected of everyone in Nepal (p. 3), even if there was little social mobility.

Overview of Nepal’s National Curriculum Framework (NCF)

Wanting to obtain equity in its education system, Nepal implemented The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) in 2007 (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). The NCF was designed to be an overarching policy document that provided a long-term vision for education and included policies and guidelines on curricula and other aspects of schooling (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). It was created to be a managerial and administrative resource, a teacher’s handbook for instruction, and a guide for school leaders (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2005, 2007). The NCF was developed in consultation with representatives from international donor organisations, global and local education experts, teachers and school leaders (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007).

Curricula Reforms

The NCF was a whole-system reform policy document and is too broad for the purposes of this study. Consequently, the focus is on NCF’s learner-centred education, which is only a part of the NCF; the focus for this study was to understand how secondary school teachers and leaders interpreted learner-centred education into their work as required by the NCF. Given that the NCF contains all the directives related to school education, this section focuses on the reforms relevant to this study. The NCF states that the vision of school education in Nepal is:

to prepare citizens dedicated to promote and protect democracy and human rights. [Students] should possess attributes like dignity of labor, committed to education, enterprising, disciplined, and capable enough to withstand the personal, social and national challenges of the twenty first century (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007, p. 32).

To actualise this vision, the NCF emphasised the importance of making the education system more engaging and interactive (Ministry of Education, National Curriculum Framework, 2007). This entailed implementing learner-centred education, which encouraged reform to the curricula, teaching/learning approaches, and the assessment system (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007, p. 34). Additionally, through learner-centered education, the NCF aimed to instill democratic values in students, help learners become more critical and perceptive of social injustices and challenge oppressive status quo (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). To implement learner-centred education, the document laid out specific directives, such as mandating all government schools be restructured to basic level for grades 1 to 8 and at secondary level for grades 9 to 12 (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007)². This restructuring was to come into immediate effect and the phasing out of the old structure was to be completed by 2010 (Ministry of Education, 2009).

The NCF stated that all schools must have appropriate infrastructure and adequate facilities and resources for learner-centred education (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). This required schools to have safe and spacious classrooms, well-resourced libraries, science and computer laboratories, and provision for students to engage in sports and extra-curricular activities (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). The NCF stated that curriculum in secondary schools would be

²Before this the school system was primary level, grade 1 to 5; lower secondary, grade 6 to 8; secondary level, grades 9 to 10; and higher secondary level, grades 11 and 12 (Ministry of Education, 2009).

categorised under general and vocational streams (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). Under the general stream, the students study language, mathematics, science, and social sciences (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). The vocational stream offers students opportunities to study agriculture, forestry, engineering or medicine (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007).

These revised curricula in secondary schools was to help students “develop creative, free, critical and analytical thinking in order to cope with the national and international challenges” (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007, p. 42). To achieve this, the NCF emphasised the importance of “training teachers to help them move away from the traditionally and transmissive teaching techniques” (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007, p. 50). Once teachers were trained, they were expected to instruct students using “interactive explorative, innovative student-centred pedagogical techniques” where they engaged with students in the co-construction of knowledge (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007, p. 50). Teachers also were required to identify the needs and interests of their students and plan lessons accordingly – to be facilitators of the learning process (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). Also, the NCF mandated that schools were to use local curricula and design lessons that were representative of students’ diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, to ensure that school environments did not represent a single culture (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007).

Furthermore, the NCF required practitioners to adopt a new assessment system, stating that “emphasis will be given to Continuous Assessment System (CAS) to assess the expected learning outcomes, behavioural change, attitudes, competency, skill and the application of feedback for teaching learning activities” (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development

Center, 2007, p. 47). Teachers were asked to use both formative and summative assessment techniques and switch to letter grading instead of marks and percentages (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). Participants were to maintain portfolios of each of their students, to monitor their progress (Ministry of Education, 2009; Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Centre, 2007). The Ministry of Education assumed that the change in the assessment system would ensure the switch to learner-centred education (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2016). The Ministry of Education introduced CAS as a separate policy and directive in the 2009 education policy (School Sector Development Program), but its implementation has been “far from effective” (Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 56).

The NCF reiterated the importance of creating a learning environment that was not based on fear (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). Teachers were expected to find creative and constructive ways to deal with problem behaviour (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007), rather than using corporal punishment (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). All forms of punishment that inflict physical or emotional harm on children were prohibited (Government of Nepal, 2016). The NCF aligned with this requirement and directed teachers to establish personal relationships with students based on mutual care, respect, and understanding (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). This change warranted an exploration of the role teachers played in implementing curriculum reform to foster learner-centred education.

The Role of Teachers in Curriculum Reform

Policy makers often put forward curricula reforms without considering teachers and often blame the rigidity of teachers for failure of implementation (Spillane, 1999; Van Driel et al., 2001). However, translation of curricula reforms is an interactive process where

teachers exercise their agency and evaluate the practicability and potential of these reforms (Mohammad and Halech-Jones, 2008; Park & Sung, 2013; Rogan & Grayson, 2003). They do so using their perceptions, beliefs, values and knowledge (Park & Sung, 2013). The meanings teachers attach to curricula reforms determine whether they will translate it onto practice (Park & Sung, 2013; Peter & Jones, 2014). It is unrealistic for policy makers to expect teachers to accept reforms and integrate them into their practice without question (Harley et al., 2000). This interactive process leads to practitioners recontextualising the reforms, often displacing their original goals for the goals of the policy reform (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008; Mohammad and Halech-Jones, 2008).

Studies show how teachers' beliefs play a crucial role in determining the fate of curricula reforms (Jessop & Penny, 1998; Roebrig et al., 2005). Sripakash (2010) studied how child-centred education was practiced in rural Indian classrooms. Basing her arguments on classroom observation data, she found that the teachers associated child-centred learning with "laughter, happiness and in some cases, individual expression in class" (Sriprakash, 2010, p. 303). However, this was not associated with learning, as the teachers believed that this primarily took place through assimilation, which involved rote learning from textbooks rather than co-constructing knowledge (Sriprakash, 2010). Brinkmann (2018), through her mixed methods study of 60 primary teachers in India, found that teachers' values were shaped by dominant ideologies, which contradicted the assumptions made by learner-centred education. Teachers believed that the most effective way to teach was to have highly controlled classrooms where lessons were focused on texts and where knowledge was assimilated rather than constructed (Brinkmann, 2018). Consequently, they rejected reform of learner-centred education as they viewed it as being a 'Western imposition', even though the Constitution of India adopted learner-centred education (Brinkmann, 2018). Song's (2015) study investigated how teachers practising student-centred education in Cambodia found that

despite teachers believing in the potential of adopting the reform, they continued to teach classes that were teacher-centred and textbook-oriented. This was because they were constrained by classroom realities (lack of appropriate physical environment and resources) and by their superficial understanding of the principles of the proposed reform.

This stance is confirmed by Mtika and Gates (2010), who through their qualitative study of four preservice teachers in Malawi, showed that teachers' understanding of the proposed reform was limited. This resulted in partial implementation or complete rejection of the recommended teaching practices. Prapaisit de Segovia and Hardison (2009) likewise found that teachers rejected Thai learner-centred reform because teachers were unsure of what it entailed. Also, Park and Sung's (2013) study on South Korean primary teachers' perceptions about curriculum reform and implementation showed that they negatively evaluated the reforms because they did not receive adequate support in translating the reforms into their practice. The participants felt the trainings they received were not adequate, so they did not have the required expertise (Park & Sung, 2013). These studies show that teachers not only reject policies because they are incongruent to their belief systems, but also do so when they do not have the conceptual clarity to execute it or the necessary support.

However, when teachers had positive outlooks towards a reform policy and were supported, they owned these recommendations and tailored them to meet the needs of their students (Paige et al., 2008). Through their study on implementation of project-based instruction in an elementary science curriculum, Krajcik et al. (1994) found that when teachers were engaged in extensive one-on-one training over longer periods, they could reflect upon their existing beliefs. This helped them accommodate their practice to the requirements of the reforms (Krajcik et al. 1994). Brooks (2005) stressed the importance of involving all relevant stakeholders when reforms are initiated. They must embrace "a new vision of professionalism, which includes roles such as instructional leaders, curriculum

managers, action researchers...” when reforms are proposed (Brooks, 2005, p. 167). So, it is fair to assume that teachers’ perceptions of policies, their knowledge regarding these propositions, and the support they receive in implementing them, determine whether the policies are translated with efficacy.

Curricula reforms in developing countries are often associated with transforming pedagogical practices in class (Montero-Seiburth, 1992). Guthrie (1990) criticised reforms that are focused on changing teachers’ teaching styles. Rather, Guthrie (1990) suggested that reforms should be geared towards strengthening the learning of students. Teachers in developing countries must overcome “an entirely different set of constraints and need different in-service provisions and their needs are very different to those of practitioners working in developed countries” (Johnson et al., 2000, p. 179). Consequently, Johnson et al. (2000) argued that the focus on changing teachers’ mindsets to help them embrace a ‘more progressive’ pedagogical approach is an unfair assumption. In resource-constrained conditions, western paradigms of teaching quality and standards cannot be applied (Guthrie, 1990, 2011).

Teachers in developing countries often have a wider range of knowledge of pedagogical approaches but may only use some of them while teaching due to contextual factors (Johnson, 2000). Therefore, the dichotomous assumption that often drives curriculum reforms is an oversimplification of what transpires inside classrooms (Barrett, 2007; Johnson et al., 2000). Subsequently, it is important to understand teachers’ experiences, opinions, perspectives and lived realities when integrating recommended reforms into practice. Accordingly, this study sought to understand how secondary school teachers and leaders in Nepal interpreted the NCF and implemented it into their daily practice. As literature shows, curriculum implementation is also dependent on the environment of the school.

The Role of the School Infrastructure and Facilities in Curriculum Reform

The availability of school infrastructure and facilities have a large bearing on the successful implementation of curriculum reform and school effectiveness (Branham, 2004; Murillo & Román, 2011; Schweisfurth, 2011). This includes basic infrastructure such as an adequate water supply, bathroom facilities, ventilated and bright classrooms, and having a suitable number of desks and chairs (Branham, 2004; Murillo & Román, 2011). Schools must also have resourced libraries, science and computer laboratories, along with an adequate supply of textbooks (Branham, 2004),

Learning and student achievement were positively influenced when physical infrastructure and resources were made available in developing countries (Dearden et al., 2001; Dustman et al., 2003; Gamoran & Long, 2006; Murillo & Román, 2011). Murillo & Román's (2011) study, which comprised of data collected from 16 countries in Latin America, argued that the availability of basic infrastructure (toilet facilities, drinking water, and classroom space) and resources (adequate textbooks, furnished libraries, computer and science laboratories, as well as provisions to engage in extracurricular activities) had a significant positive impact on school quality and achievement. Similarly, Branham's (2004) study in the United States showed that the condition of school infrastructure had consequences in student attendance and drop-out rates. Subsequently, Murillo & Román, (2011) criticised policy makers for minimising the impact adequate infrastructure and facilities can have on implementing reforms and improving the quality of education students receive.

Guthrie (1990) also argued that it is unrealistic for policymakers to want teachers to implement curricula reform that requires teachers to use teaching techniques that engage students in experiential learning, as they have to cope with "inadequate classroom furniture, absence of equipment, and lack of classroom insulation, making even moderate noise levels a disturbance in other classrooms" (p. 4). Studies on implementation of curriculum reforms

further substantiate Guthrie's claim of how reforms are bound to fail when there is lack of appropriate infrastructure, and adequate facilities and resources (Barrett, 2007; Johnson, 2000; Jessop & Penny, 1998; Schweisfurth, 2011; Sriprakash, 2010; Tabulawa, 1998). In her study of the implementation of "thematic curriculum" in Uganda from the perspectives of teachers, Altinyelken (2010) found that teachers did not have access to the learning resources that were necessary to implement the new "thematic curriculum," despite their enthusiasm and belief in the promises of this proposed reform. To remedy this, teachers spent their weekends creating educative materials, which they found tiring and resulted in many teachers not practising the reform (Altinyelken, 2010). Similarly, Schweisfurth (2011) conducted a systematic review of seventy-two articles that studied curriculum reform implementation in developing countries across the world. She found that the lack of appropriate infrastructure, facilities, and resources were often constraints that prevented the integration of recommended policies into practice. Therefore, successful implementation of curriculum reform relies on the availability of infrastructure and resources. Another important aspect that impacts the implementation of reforms is the politicisation of the education sector.

The Politicisation of Principals in Curricula Reform

The education sector is an "arena of contesting purposes, values and practices" frequently described as a political process and teachers as political actors (Reid et al., 1998, p. 247). Teachers, educational bureaucrats, politicians, business leaders, community members, parents and students (Brooks & Brooks, 2019; Reid et al., 1998) are stakeholders who have vested interests in education by exercising varying degrees of power (Reid et al., 1998). School leaders are often found at the forefront, managing this dynamic (Brooks & Brooks, 2019; O'Malley, 2010). While implementing reforms, principals often face staff members rejecting changes because they experience differing social and political ideologies (Brooks & Brooks, 2019; Carney et al., 2007; Khaniya & William, 2004; Pherali, 2011). In

their study on how principals in Philippines practised culturally relevant leadership, Brooks and Brooks (2019) found that Filipino principals were “street level bureaucrats” (p.15) and used their personal and political networks to pool necessary resources and people to address specific problems while managing their schools. If principals’ political alliances did not match the staff and community’s political party, it was challenging for principals to lead schools because they had little opportunity to access needed resources (Brooks & Brooks, 2019). Similarly, Pherali (2013) studied the Maoist insurgency and the continued political intrusion in the Nepali education sector. Pherali (2013) claimed that “all educational stakeholders including teachers, principals, district education officers (DEOs), and school management committee members, were affiliated with political parties,” and subsequently prioritised their political and economic interests over the welfare of the students (p.62). Mathema’s (2007) paper also discussed how teachers, principals and District Education Officers in Nepal were more accountable to their political parties than their workplaces. Therefore, the political dimension plays a critical role in policy implementation in education sectors.

Challenges in the Nepali Education System

In spite of the numerous reform efforts of the Nepali government to implement more progressive and inclusive learner-centred education, the system remains plagued with structural challenges and inequalities (Bhatta, 2011; Caddell, 2005, 2006, 2007; Carney & Bista, 2009; Carney et al., 2007; Pherali, 2011, 2013; Rapple, 2011). Nepal government officials see the lack of quality in school education as the greatest issue (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2016) and experts (Bhatta, 2011; Caddell, 2005, 2006, 2007; Carney & Bista, 2009; Pherali, 2011). Lack of educational quality influences Nepal’s high repetition and drop-out rates amongst those who belong to marginalised and indigenous groups (Bhatta, 2011, Caddell, 2006; Carney & Bista, 2009; Pherali, 2013; Yadava, 2007). Despite the Net

Enrolment Ratio increasing to 95%, 35 % of students drop out during primary schools and only 55 % graduate from secondary school at their first attempt (Ministry of Education, 2010, 2011).

Nepali schools continue to legitimise the values and cultural practices of the dominant castes/class and reinforce systemic social inequalities (Carney, 2007; Pherali, 2013). To provide an example, traditional narratives embedded in the curricula undermine the cultural diversity present in Nepali society by its glorification of leaders who come from the dominant castes (Pherali, 2011; Pherali & Garratt, 20014). Subsequently, the education system is criticised for being structurally advantageous to people from the privileged castes whose native language is Nepali (Pherali & Garratt, 2014; Pherali, 2011). Children from marginalised communities struggle to access secondary school education because their parents lack both economic and social capital and capacity to afford the costs involved (Carney, 2009; Pherali, 2011). It is also important to note that students who attend government schools in urban areas largely belong to the poorest and most marginalised groups (Ministry of Education, 2012). Most of these children work as domestic help or at hotels and restaurants. Many children work as dishwashers, requiring them to “work long hours and [they are] often are unpaid or underpaid” (Sherchan, 2001, p. 2).

Despite the government criminalising corporal punishment in schools, it is still practised as the primary form of administering punishments to students (Mishra et al., 2010). Shrestha and Thakuri (2004) claimed that 60% of teachers used corporal punishment (both physical and mental forms) to discipline students. Culturally, it is believed that physical force needs to be used to ensure children learn from their mistakes and do not digress from social norms (Khanal & Park, 2016). Also, the Hindu influence in the country endorses the use of physical and mental punishment because it is believed that learning is a serious endeavour that is most effective under strict conditions (Khanal & Park, 2016). The government

continues to discourage the use of corporal punishment; however, efforts are yet to yield behavioural and attitudinal change amongst teachers and parents (Khanal & Park, 2016; Mishra et al., 2010).

Political interference and the politicisation of educational stakeholders are major factors that affect the daily functioning and implementation of recommended reforms (Pherali, 2011; Rappleye, 2011). After the peace agreement in 2006, education became a campaigning space where policies were dictated by political ideologies instead of factoring in the practical implications (Pherali, 2013). In Nepal, politicisation also represents corruption carried out by influential people or by political groups, within or outside of the education sector (Pherali, 2013). Pherali's (2013) study revealed that members of school management committees were elected based on their political ideologies and alliances instead of their commitment to education reform policies. The study also showed that teachers, school leaders, and district education officers were all affiliated with political parties and pursued their own personal and economic interests (Pherali, 2013). Consequently "educational management and bureaucracy, teacher recruitment and redeployment, transfers of district education officers and school upgrades all involved political interference and corruption" (Pherali, 2013, p. 62). Thus, the challenges facing the education sector of Nepal are large. Learner-centred education is a main avenue by which the Ministry of Education seeks to improve educational outcomes.

Learner-Centred Education (LCE)

Learner-Centred Education is recognised as an approach to teaching and learning that improves all aspects of student progress (Lattimer, 2015; Mtika & Gates, 2010; Schweisfurth, 2011; Song, 2015; Sriprakash, 2010). In developing countries, like Nepal, learner-centred education is considered a viable alternative to the practice of teacher-centred education or transmissive teaching practices (Mtika & Gates, 2010; Schweisfurth, 2013). It is associated

with progressive education, problem-based learning, enquiry driven education and constructivism (Lattimer, 2015; O’Sullivan, 2004; Brinkmann, 2018).

Learner-centred education functions under the assumption that learning is optimum when the following conditions are met: (1) A teacher facilitates the learning process rather than disseminating knowledge authoritatively; (2) Rigid content-driven curriculum is replaced by flexible locally relevant content; (3) Students are given individual attention and encouraged to question and critically engage in the learning process; (4) Lessons are designed to meet the interests of the learners; (5) A variety of teaching techniques and pedagogies ensures that students acquire the necessary skills; and (6) High stake examinations are replaced by assessment systems that continuously monitor student progress (Lattimer, 2015; Schweisfurth, 2013; Song, 2015).

Globally, policymakers favour learner-centred education as an intervention for multiple reasons. First, learner-centred education assumes that students are intrinsically motivated when they control their own learning processes (Lattimer, 2015; Mtika & Gates, 2010). Second, learner-centred education creates opportunities for learners to critically engage with knowledge and society, which can positively transform nations (Lattimer, 2015; Mtika & Gates, 2010). Lastly, learner-centred education helps develop a nation’s human resources as people become creative, analytical, flexible and independent — an imperative set of skills required to strengthen economies (Lattimer, 2015; Mtika & Gates 2010).

Learner centred education as a borrowed Western concept. Critical academics argue that learner-centred education is a western construct (Guthrie, 1990, 2011; O’Sullivan, 2002, 2004; Schweisfurth, 2011, 2013; Tabaluwa, 2003). It is exported to developing countries as a “policy panacea” (Sriprakash, 2010, p.297), a solution to solve greater problems, such as poverty (Brinkmann, 2018; Guthrie, 2011; O’Sullivan, 2004; Schweisfurth, 2011; Tabulawa, 2003). This reduces learner-centred education reform policies to a “hooray

term” which fails to bring about the transformations promised, making it another empty idea (Schweisfurth, 2011; Tabulawa, 2003). It is also viewed by critics as another hegemonic tool used to reinforce Western liberal democratic values that benefits neoliberalism (Tabulawa, 2003). This line of argument is supported by studies conducted by Regmi (2017), Lattimer (2015), Song, (2015) and Sriprakash (2010) that show how governments are pressured by donor organisations, like the World Bank, to integrate learner-centred education into their national education policies. Schweisfurth (2011) showed that many such policies in developing countries are drafted by individuals from the global north and written in complex and culturally inaccessible language, making it incomprehensible and unimplementable for teachers and school leaders.

However, You (2019) argued that learner-centred education also includes elements of eastern philosophy as some of its principles are similar to Confucian teaching philosophies. Confucian teaching philosophies encourage learners to be deeply involved in the learning process. Through a Confucian lens, learners are taught according to their abilities and develop life skills that will contribute to the wider society (You, 2019). When learner-centred education was implemented in China, it was hybridised to fit the cultural context (You, 2019). Despite some similarities with Confucian teaching philosophy, learner-centred education originated from the West and was underpinned by Western philosophies, particularly John Dewey (Schweisfurth, 2013; Sriprakash, 2010; Song, 2015; Tan, 2015).

Thompson’s (2013) study of high school English teachers in Nigeria found that when practitioners were allowed to engage with learner-centred education as a policy, they derived contextually relevant practices in line with the reform’s philosophy. It is important to note that Thompson’s (2013) study took place in a well-resourced high performing private school in Nigeria, which may skew his findings. In You’s (2019) study, a majority of developing countries that adopted learner-centered education struggled with teachers understanding its

intent. For these teachers, success was associated with succeeding in exams, memorising content and writing suitable answers based on past papers. Therefore, integration of learner-centred education policies without taking into consideration cultural contexts has led to “utter confusion” resulting in minimal implementation and no improvements in the quality of the education system as envisioned (Bhatta, 2011, p. 17). In other words, Harley et al. (2000) metaphorically described the failure of implementation of the borrowed policy as a form of “tissue rejection” (p. 287).

Consequently, “the history of implementation of learner-centred education in different contexts is riddled with stories of failures grand and small raising fundamental questions about the nature of the policy” (Schweisfurth, 2011, p. 425). It has become common practice for policy makers to issue directives ordering practitioners to unequivocally implement changes without considering the complex realities in which teachers’ function (Brinkmann, 2018; Barrett, 2007; Vavrus, 2009). Yet, studies show that physical infrastructure and resources impaired the implementation of learner-centred education. Song’s (2015) study in Cambodia and Sriprakash’s (2010) in India both show how a large number of students in class makes it difficult to employ learner-centred pedagogies.

Implementation of education reform is often impeded by practitioners’ superficial understanding of learner-centred education. O’Sullivan’s (2004) study of trained primary school preservice teachers in Namibia showed that they lacked the conceptual clarity required to successfully implement learner-centred education. O’Sullivan (2004) further noted that the participants were not familiar with terms like “facilitate,” “analyse,” “synthesize,” which were integral components of learner-centred education philosophy (O’Sullivan, 2004). Serbessa (2006) also found that Ethiopian schoolteachers failed to translate what they learnt in training, as it was too foreign to their lived realities. While, Mtika & Gates’ (2010) study of graduates from a teacher college in Malawi, who were not translating learner-centred

education into classroom practice, showed that their teaching styles were reflective of their cultural beliefs and they often mimicked their own teachers' teaching styles.

Additionally, learner-centred education implementation was further hindered because teachers were not culturally comfortable with the possible “loss of control and authority” (Lattimer, 2015, p. 67; Sriprakash, 2010). Tabaluwa (1997) found that teachers in Botswana were hesitant to implement learner-centred education approaches because it came into conflict with their existing beliefs of what constitutes teachers, instruction and appropriate lessons. In addition, learner-centred education became difficult to practice, because teachers were expected to prepare students for high stake exams, which had dense content (Lattimer, 2015; O’Sullivan, 2004). Subsequently, teachers continued to use traditional teaching methods to make progress with their course content (Mtika & Gates, 2010; Vavrus, 2009), leaving learner-centred pedagogies as a way to entertain students through laughter and fun (Song, 2015; Sriprakash, 2010).

Developing countries, including Nepal, predominantly practise traditional teacher-centred pedagogies (Caddell, 2007; Carney, 2008; Pherali, 2011; Pherali & Garrett, 2014; Thompson, 2013). In Nepal, rote learning is the most prevalent technique used – where students are given readymade answers to questions (Pherali, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2009, 2016). Like other developing nations, Nepali students are only assessed through written examinations (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2009, 2016). Education is often prescriptive and there is no space for critical thinking or creativity (Caddell, 2007). Thus, learner-centred education fails because it often does not consider the lived realities of teachers and school leaders. It is essential to take this into account if reforms are to materialise.

Conceptual Framework: “Classroot Realities”

The literature discussing learner-centred education policy implementation in developing countries shows that reform implementation does not consider the individual contexts in which teachers work and students learn (Barrett, 2007; Brinkmann, 2018; Lattimer, 2015; Mtika & Gates, 2010; Schweisfurth, 2011, 2013, 2015; Sriprakash, 2010; Song, 2015; Tabaluwa, 2003, 1997, 1998; Vavrus, 2009). This mismatch between policy and practice is reflected in O’Sullivan’s (2002) “classroot realities” framework. This framework details the objective and subjective realities facing the implementation of policy reforms.

Defining “Classroot Realities”

“Classroot realities” are the conditions in which teachers are expected to implement curricula reforms (O’Sullivan, 2002). Teachers are instrumental in determining the success or failure of reform policies (Macdonald, 2001; O’Sullivan, 2002; Spillane, 1999). However studies (Brinkman, 2018; O’ Sullivan, 2002; Schweisfurth, 20011; Song, 2015; Tabulawa, 2003) show that the policies often ignore the contexts of the schools in their design and implementation. O’Sullivan (2002) referred to these factors as “classroot realities” and argued that this is key to understanding how teachers respond to reforms initiated by governments. The “classroot realities” framework is divided into two broad categories which are the objective and subjective classrooms realities.

Objective Reality Implementation Factors

Objective reality implementation factors refer to the physical, personal and professional contexts within which teachers implement the reforms (O’Sullivan, 2002). These are tangible factors such as infrastructure, resources, political contexts and teacher capacity, and organisational culture (Hawes & Stephens, 1990; O’Sullivan, 2002). Each will be discussed in turn.

Infrastructure and resources. To implement LCE reforms, schools must be equipped with adequate infrastructure and facilities (O’ Sullivan, 2002; Sriprakash, 2010; Song, 2010). They should have safe child-friendly toilet and water facilities, as well as

buildings and classrooms with space for children to engage in extra-curricular activities and sports (McLaughlin, 1987; Ministry of Education, 2009, 2016; Ravi & Rao, 1994). Schools should also have “learner-centred” facilities such as appropriate desks and chairs, libraries, equipped science and computer laboratories (Bajracharya & Brouwer, 1998; Ministry of Education, 2009, 2018; Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007; UNESCO, 2010, 2012).

Not only is appropriate physical infrastructure necessary to implement LCE reforms, but resources are just as important for the policy to materialise into practice. Learner-centred schools must have adequate teaching and learning materials to meet the demands of learner-centred education (Jessop & Penny, 1998; Song, 2010; Urwick & Junaidu, 1991). For teachers to implement learner-centred instruction, they should have access to a wide range of materials to develop engaging lessons (Ravi & Rao, 1994). Textbooks are instrumental in involving students in group work in large classrooms but should not be relied on for the majority of instruction (Paige et al., 2008; Urwick & Junaidu, 1991). For reforms to materialise, schools should be equipped with basic infrastructure, resources, and facilities to support learner-centred teaching and learning approaches (Jessop & Penny, 1998; O’Sullivan, 2002, 2004).

Professional capacity of teachers. Another objective reality implementation factor is the professional capacity of teachers to deliver LCE in line with policy expectations. O’Sullivan (2002, 2004) argued that teachers in developing countries enter the teaching profession because they do not have the necessary credentials to work in other sectors (Mathema, 2007; Schweisfurth, 2011). Ministries of Education in developing countries do provide trainings to improve teacher instruction. However, these trainings are often in the form of one-off sessions which are detached from the lived realities of teachers, making the learned skills difficult to transfer to classrooms (Caddell, 2005; Vavrus, 2009). Furthermore, teachers often lack the support needed to bring about transformation in their teaching practices (O’Sullivan, 2002).

Political factors. Policy implementation is a complex process (Brinkmann, 2018; Schweisfurth, 2011). This is because education is political (Brooks and Brooks, 2019) and occurs where political parties, business leaders and educational bureaucrats pursue their vested agendas (Pherali, 2013). These groups are influential and control the education system, either internally or externally (Pherali, 2013; Reid et al., 1998). Consequently, policies are rejected, not because they are not viable, but because they are not proposed by the right political alliance (Brooks & Brooks, 2019; Pherali, 2013). Similarly, it is a challenge for teachers and school leaders to reach stated goals if they are affiliated with the “wrong” political alliance (Brooks & Brooks, 2019; Pherali, 2013). In contexts where political parties hold sway over educational resources, school leaders who are not aligned with the local ruling party may find it challenging to garner needed resources (Brooks & Brooks, 2019). In contexts of socio-political unrest, schoolteachers and leaders may face hostile stakeholders that challenge their abilities to effectively implement reforms, thus limiting or halting educational improvement (Brooks & Brooks, 2019).

Subjective Reality Implementation Factors

Subjective reality implementation factors are less tangible and more abstract than objective realities (O’Sullivan, 2002). As teachers are the drivers of the implementation of policies, it is important to consider their “subjective realities” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 224), specifically their cultural values, beliefs, adaptability, openness, perceptions, motivation and their desire of the proposed reforms.

Cultural beliefs and values. Teachers are not passive. They negotiate meanings based on their own schema, knowledge, values, and beliefs (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008). “Cultural socialization” influences practitioners’ beliefs, opinions, norms, and values (Kanu, 2005). If policy is not aligned with this “learnt cultural schema,” it often is dismissed (O’Sullivan, 2004). Therefore, policy makers cannot expect teachers to unequivocally adopt recommended reforms, thereby emphasising the importance of considering the cultural

contexts before proposing recommendations (Mtika & Gates, 2010; Sriprakash, 2010) These include, teacher's cultural beliefs of how learning takes place, how teachers and students should behave with each other, the role of teachers, and how learning is assessed (Brinkmann, 2018; Schweisfurth, 2011; Tabulawa, 2003; Vavrus, 2009).

Perceived desirability of the proposed reform. For the implementation of reforms to occur, teachers need to view the reform as desirable and beneficial (O'Sullivan, 2002). Reforms are often resisted because they question learned skills, perceptions, and philosophies (Fullan, 2009). Teachers tend to assess how the proposed reforms affect them personally (O'Sullivan, 2002, 2004). Therefore, they need to be convinced that the proposed reforms will have greater impact than existing practices (O'Sullivan, 2002; Hawes & Stephens, 1990). Furthermore, these proposed changes should not be perceived as a threat to their existing identity or power (Bishop, 1986; O'Sullivan, 2002).

Teacher motivation, adaptability and attitude. When reforms are implemented, teachers need to be motivated to acquire new skills (O'Sullivan, 2002). This requires extra time and effort, often resulting in a reorganisation of beliefs (Sriprakash, 2010; Song, 2010). For reforms to remain long lasting, teachers need to have an open attitude and be motivated to take on the challenges that may arise in the process of adapting to new ways of teaching (O'Sullivan, 2002; Serbessa, 2006). This does not happen instantly, as it takes time for teachers to internalise policy recommendations (Brinkmann, 2018; Lattimer, 2015; O'Sullivan, 2002; Schweisfurth, 2011; Tabaluwa, 2003) and involves tapping into practitioners' internal beliefs and perceptions, which cannot be segregated from cultural contexts. Thus, implementing reforms is a dialectical process where different factors are at play. Ignoring any of these factors can hamper reform implementation.

Summary

In this chapter, the literature showed that implementing reforms is “messy” and complicated. Curricular reforms are negotiated, reinterpreted, adjusted and tailored to the needs of the context and by practitioners. Also, curricular reform brings with it different sets of ideologies that represent specific interests. O’Sullivan’s “classroots realities” was the conceptual framework that was used as a lens to better understand how teachers and school leaders in Nepal interpreted and implemented the NCF’s learner-centred education reform policy into their practice.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to better understand how Nepali secondary school teachers and leaders implemented the National Curriculum Framework's learner-centred education policy in their work. This chapter presents the design of the study, a qualitative case study, and discusses participant selection, data collection and analysis techniques, trustworthiness, as well as my own positionality, ethics and the limitations of the study.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study research design. According to Merriam (1998) the case study method is appropriate to study 'practical issues,' such as the impact of policies on the ground level to understand how it is translated into practice (Merriam, 1998). A case study method was relevant for this research in order to better understand how Nepali teachers and school leaders interpreted the NCF's policy of learner-centred education in their work. As participants shared their stories within their lived realities (Baxter & Jack, 2008), "thick descriptions" (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Geertz, 1973; Merriam, 1998, 2009) of their experiences of implementing learner-centred education in accordance with the NCF were created. This shed light on their specific practices and understandings of the policy as filtered through their personal beliefs and the realities of teaching in Nepal (Merriam, 1998).

Case study research design was appropriate for this study because of its 'particularistic' nature; i.e. it focused on understanding perceptions and practices of secondary school teachers and leaders in Kathmandu who were interpreting the NCF's learner-centred education in their work (Gerring, 2017; Merriam, 1998, 2009). As the study also sought to provide policy makers with ways to improve the implementation of curricular reform in Nepali secondary schools, it was necessary to generate an understanding of how the

participants were adhering to the directives of the NCF and the influence this had on student learning (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

The Case

The case for this study was secondary government schools located in Kathmandu Valley (Merriam, 1998, 2009). There were five schools participating in the study. All these schools ran classes from grade one to grade ten and were in the process of expanding up to grade 12. Teachers employed at the schools were permanent staff members of the Ministry of Education. The schools were managed by the principals in coordination with the School Management Committees (SMCs). The buildings were in the process of being reconstructed because they were destroyed during the 2015 earthquake. There was a strong donor presence in these schools. Libraries and other facilities, such as water systems, were being built through the financial support of international donor organisations. The buildings were similar in all participating schools. Classrooms were arranged in rows of attached benches and desks. Staffrooms were similarly organised, with the principal often sharing the space with the rest of the teachers. The five schools were once prestigious schools where children belonging to elite families were enrolled. Now, however, the majority of the student population belong to the lowest socio-economic status, there is a dwindling number of students and the five schools are struggling to make ends meet.

Participants

There were six participants in the study, two male teachers, two female teachers and two female school leaders. To recruit participants, the school leaders nominated potential participants for the study. Upon our first meeting, I presented them with the explanatory statement and the letter from the university. This helped me gain legitimacy as a researcher and to build rapport. The study aimed to include a heterogeneous population based on gender, class, caste, teaching experience, and age; however, time constraints and availability of

teachers limited the diversity of the participants. The teachers in the study identified as belonging to the Brahmin-Chettri caste and were between the ages of 35-45. All practitioners had more than ten years of teaching experience. A description of each participant is presented below:

Rita is the principal of Sagarmatha Secondary School. She currently teaches grades nine and ten English. Rita has a Master's degree in Education, English and Sociology. She received a gold medal for both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees. She has worked as a secondary school English teacher for the last 15 years in secondary schools outside of Kathmandu Valley. She was named as one of the most effective school leaders in Kathmandu by the Ministry of Education.

Akanchha, a female school leader, was in her 3rd year of leadership in Kanchanjunga Higher Secondary School. She holds a Master's degree in Education and in the Nepali language. Prior to this, she worked as a school inspector for five years and was well versed with rules and reform policies. She also taught in the same secondary school for eight years before being appointed the principal. She taught grades 9 and 10 the Nepali language.

Surabhi has a Master's in Health, Population and Environment and in Education. Currently she is pursuing a Master of Philosophy to help her "improve her English." This is her second year of teaching in Dhaulagiri High School. She teaches Economics to grades 9 and 10. She initially became a government school high school teacher to teach Health, Population and Environment. She taught for 11 years in schools around the country, particularly in the south.

Saroj is a Social Studies teacher in Annapurna Secondary School. He teaches Social Studies to grades 9 and 10. He has a Master's degree in Education and Sociology. This is his tenth year working in this school. He said he hopes to retire from this school.

Soumya is an English teacher in Manaslu Secondary School. She teaches grades 9 and 10. This is her fourth year working in her current school. She has a Bachelor's degree in Education. She has taught English to secondary school students for the last 12 years. She also worked as a school principal for three years in a rural village in the outskirts of Kathmandu. She is an artist and volunteers to make posters and wall hangings for her school.

Saakar is a mathematics teacher in Annapurna Secondary School. He teaches students from grade 9 to 12. This is his twelfth year working as a mathematics teacher. Saakar has a Master's degree in Mathematics and Education. He wants to specialise in further mathematics and teach at university level.

Data Collection Techniques

To understand how Nepali secondary school leaders and teachers interpreted the NCF's learner-centred education policy into practice, a holistic description and analysis was needed (Merriam, 1998). This mandated both breadth and depth of data collection (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, data collection in the qualitative case study is "recursive and interactive" and so, in line with the design, I used semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and document analysis to collect data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Merriam, 1998, p. 134). Using multiple techniques to collect data helped generate thick and nuanced descriptions of the perceptions, understandings and practices of teachers and school leaders in interpreting the proposed recommendations in their schools and classrooms (Merriam, 1998). This allowed me to explore the multiple facets involved in the process of policy implementation and to triangulate the findings. (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2002).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary source of data collection. They focused on teachers' perceptions, understandings and interpretations of the NCF (Merriam, 2009). Participants were interviewed twice, and the interviews lasted approximately 90

minutes each. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim (Freebody, 2003; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Ritchie et al., 2013).

The interview questions were grounded in the conceptual framework, O’Sullivan’s (2002), “classrooms realities” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Merriam, 1998). O’Sullivan (2002) argued that curriculum reform implementation needs to consider the contextual realities of practitioners (both objective and subjective implementation factors). I used a wide range of questions that allowed me to uncover the participants’ nuanced beliefs and opinions about the NCF and learner-centred education (Hesse-biber, 2014; Merriam, 2009). Specifically, this technique is referred to as “funneling” (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p.84) and “permits flexibility in participant responses” (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, p.96) and yielded rich data.

The first interview focused on understanding the participants and gaining insight into their lives (Hesse-biber, 2014). I asked questions about their lives, their families, why they became teachers, their hopes, struggles, and experiences of teaching (Hesse-biber, 2014; Legard et al., 2003). Some of the questions I asked in the first interview were as follows: Can you please tell me about yourself? What was it like growing up? Why did you become a teacher? What disheartens you most in the world? What is your philosophy on life? The participants were encouraged to speak freely (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). This also helped to develop rapport with the participants (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2012; Merriam, 1998; Ritchie et al., 2013). At the first interview, all the participants expressed how they were hesitant when I first approached them, but that they opened up to me because I was now their “*bahini*” (younger sister). This meant that they regarded me as part of their family. I also noticed that their responses started becoming more detailed and nuanced as I spent more time with them.

The second interview flowed more smoothly as they were more comfortable answering questions about their work (Legard et al., 2003). I asked questions about the NCF,

their perceptions on the reform initiative and on their classroom practices. I went on to ask: What is your philosophy in teaching? What are your views on the NCF and learner-centred education? How do you deal with change? What are your greatest challenges while implementing learner-centred education in class? How does the organisation help you implement the NCF? In this interview, they spoke about organisational politics, corruption, issues in implementing NCF, lived realities of their students, and the challenges they faced. All participants were eager to tell their stories and experiences (Merriam, 2009).

Observations

To understand how secondary school teachers and leaders interpreted NCF's learner-centred education into practice, I observed two classes run by each participant and took field notes. The observation technique "provide(d) a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a second-hand account of the world obtained in an interview" (Merriam, 2009, p. 117). Further, observation data allowed me to compare what the participants said with how they behaved. This helped me triangulate interview data.

During my observations, I sat at the back of the classroom because this gave me a full view. As part of my observations, I also took field notes of teacher activities in the staffroom (Merriam, 2009). My field notes included details about the physical setting (including how the classes were set up), what was displayed, the staffroom and the principal's office. I observed and noted how the participants conducted lessons, how they interacted with their students, how they dealt with problem behaviour in class, and how they responded to questions posed in class. I also observed how the participants carried themselves and their interactions with the environment, including their tone of voice, body language and personal demeanour, and noted teaching and learning moments in the lessons. Finally, I took note of my own behaviour and thoughts, ensuring that I kept a record of "observer's notes" to not simply reproduce the situation (Atkins & Wallace, 2012; Merriam, 1998; Sanger, 2002).

Observational data was recorded in my journal and this was used to triangulate emerging findings gathered from interviews and document analysis (Merriam, 1998; Lichtman, 2012; Seidman, 2006). This ensured that the data gathered was valid.

Document Analysis

Described as “mute evidence” (Bowen, 2009; Hodder, 2012, p.703), documents have the “attraction of always being available and factual” (Brantliniger, et al., 2005, p. 200) and unobtrusive in nature as they remain consistent over time (Dauite et al., 2015). They also have the advantage of being fixed and non-reactive; that is, “the researcher does not affect the situation as he or she would in an interview or other form of interpersonal inquiry” (Hook, 1985, p.213). In my field work, I collected policy documents drafted by the Ministry of Education, handouts and lesson plan templates. I also took photographs of wall paintings, quotes, signs, and of pictures displayed both in the classroom and around the school. These pictures also aided in conducting photo elicitation where the pictures were “snippets of reality” (Margolis, 1999, p. 8). However, this was only used as a component within the overall case study research design.

These documents were part of the social, cultural and institutional context within which this research was located (Kim, 2016; Merriam, 2009). Collecting and analysing these documents helped me “unpack assumptions and explore the foundational ideas underpinning the policies” that I studied (Diem & Young, 2015, p. 842). Document analysis also helped to identify “silences” (Diem & Young, 2015; p. 842), revealing power dynamics at play in the schools (Diem & Young, 2015). Document analysis added depth to the existing data gathered from interviews and observations (Clandinin, 2006, 2007; Daiute, 2015; Kim, 2016) and helped me to further ‘thicken’ the data and triangulate interview and observation data (Bryman, 2016; Merriam, 1998).

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the “process of making sense out of the collected data” (Merriam, 2009; p. 175). In line with qualitative case study design, I employed memoing as a research technique and

systematically arranged field notes, observation notes, interview transcripts, pictures and everything else I had collected during my field work (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Ritchie et al., 2014). I maintained a journal where I wrote down reflections, thoughts, musings, ideas and impressions (Birks et al., 2008). This journal also helped me gain clarity while interpreting and analysing data as it established “a deep connection with the data enabling a heightened sensitivity to the meanings contained therein” (Birks et al., 2008, p.68). I transcribed verbatim all the audio-recorded interviews from Nepali into English, and then had my transcripts read by a professional transcription agency which endorsed the accuracy of the translation. I also typed my written field notes.

Data analysis involved identifying patterns in the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Merriam, 2009; Ritchie et al., 2014). Using an inductive and iterative process (Merriam, 1998) when analysing the data, I used a priori codes generated from the conceptual framework and developed categories and then themes – see Table 1 below. The a priori codes, categories and themes reflected emergent aspects in the data that helped me answer the research questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). I reread the data and added more data in underdeveloped themes and categories, identified conceptual patterns that cut across categories, and analysed this in relation to the extant literature (Ritchie et al., 2014). This was a back and forth process until the categories were “saturated” (Merriam, 2009, p. 182).

Table 1 Codes and themes used for data analysis

SN	A Priori Codes	Categories	Themes
	<u>Objective factors</u>		
1	<i>Resources</i> Physical infrastructure Availability of teaching learning materials Learning environment	Inadequate Unsuitable Scarce Reflects traditional practices (Subjective factor)	The struggles to create a learning environment supportive and conducive to the requirements of the NCF Learning environments failed to support LCE
2	<i>Professional Capacity and support</i> Skills for instruction and assessment	Lack of ability to improvise lessons to meet the needs of students in class Lack of innovation and creativity	Striving for learner-centred pedagogies Consequences of switching to the new ‘Continuous Assessment System’ (CAS)

	<p>Knowledge of subject material</p> <p>Implementation ability of learner-centred education</p>	<p>Lack of understanding of reforms</p> <p>Lack of understanding of the new system of assessments</p> <p>Superficial understanding of learner-centred education</p>	
3	<p><i>Learner capacity</i></p> <p>Student population belonging to diverse backgrounds and have different learning needs and ability</p> <p>Students belong to the lowest Social and economic status (SES)</p> <p>Teacher bias/micro aggression</p>	<p>Challenge to deal with children belonging to the lowest SES</p> <p>Importance of belonging to a “respectable” family</p>	The NCF ignores the lived realities of the children
4	<p><i>Principal’s capacity</i></p> <p>Leadership’s influence on school culture</p> <p>Positional authority The appointment of school leader</p> <p>Trust In school leader</p>	<p>Principals are fund raisers, managers, teachers, administrators and personal relation officers</p> <p>Lack of authority to hold teachers accountable</p> <p>Lack of clarity and support from the ministry and its departments</p> <p>Politicisation</p>	<p>Lack of respect and accountability towards school leaders</p> <p>Teachers Service Commission’s recruitment system in conflict with the NCF directives</p>
	<u>Subjective implementation factors</u>		
1	<p><i>Relevance and desirability</i></p> <p>Perceived relevance of proposed reforms and changes</p>	<p>Impractical in the Nepali context</p> <p>Ignores the actual challenges</p> <p>Appeal of proposed idea</p>	Distrust about borrowing learning ideas from the ‘West’

	Perceived desirability of these changes and reforms		
2	<i>Culture</i> Teacher student relationship Corporal punishment	Expectations from students Disciplining students is a necessity	“We are not just teachers; we are their surrogate parents”

Establishing Trustworthiness of Data

I triangulated data generated from the observations, interviews and documents to establish credibility (Miles & Huberman., 1994; Shenton, 2004). This helped me cross-verify the data that was gathered (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Shenton, 2004). It helped develop a more holistic understanding of the phenomena and encapsulate the complexities and nuances in the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Merriam, 1998). Triangulation also highlighted some of the incongruence between what the participants said, how they behaved, and what the policy documents directed (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Houghton et al., 2013). I also used member checks to improve the credibility of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Shenton, 2004). During interviews I restated what they told me in order to verify whether what I was hearing was correct (Shenton, 2004). The research also underwent peer feedback (my supervisors) to ensure that the study was trustworthy (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009; Merriam, 1998; Shenton, 2004).

Ethics

Before I sought the participants’ informed consent, I first approached the principals of the participating schools. I presented them with the explanatory statement (Appendix A) (and the translated version) as well as the consent forms (Appendix B) along with the letter provided by the university (Appendix C). After being allowed to move forward with my

research, I then sought written consent from the participants. All of them signed the consent forms in line with Monash University protocol.

Researcher Positionality

I was emic to this study because I come from the same culture, speak the language and understand the cultural nuances and subtleties to a certain extent (Bourke, 2014; Otten & Geppert, 2009). I was born and brought up in Kathmandu. However, I spent a substantial part of my childhood living in different countries in Southern Africa and attending international schools. I belong to a Brahmin-Chettri family. I attended a prestigious private school in Nepal where I experienced student-centred instruction/education. My learning experience is not a lived reality for the majority of Nepali students. Therefore, this makes me an outsider in terms of my learning experiences and expectations. However, I taught for five and a half years as an English language teacher in a high-ranking private school in Kathmandu. Simultaneously, I worked as a mentor/tutor with government school students of the same age group to help ensure they completed their schooling. These experiences exposed me to the schooling system and so I am not completely unfamiliar with the context.

I come to this study with a belief that children, regardless of their background or status, should have access to quality education that engages them in the learning process, instils in them values (curiosity, sincerity, honesty, and persistence), and life skills. I believe that learner-centered education does not have a singular model of being practiced but rather it needs to be tailored and devised within the cultural context of the specific society at hand. Also, I bring a critical opinion towards the Nepali educational policies, which I feel were drafted in collaboration with donor organisations without considering the lived realities of teachers and students. I shared these opinions with the participants. I was aware that this disclosure might deter my participants from opening up completely or saying things that I wanted to hear. To minimise this, I sought to collect data using multiple techniques,

interviews, observations and document analysis. I also maintained a reflective journal to document my biases and how they evolved (Merriam, 2009). This helped me become more aware of my own positioning and the influence that this may have had on data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009).

Limitations of the Study

This study sought to better understand how teachers and school leaders in Nepali secondary schools interpreted the NCF's learner-centred education into practice through their lived realities. Based on this, it aimed to generate possible insights that policymakers could use to improve the implementation of curricular reform in secondary schools in Nepal. As I was "the primary instrument gathering data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 20), it was inevitable "that mistakes [were] made, opportunities missed, [and] personal biases interfere[d]" (Merriam, 1998, p. 20). To try and minimise this, I asked the participants to clarify and elaborate on what they were saying so that I could develop a better understanding of the participants' experiences in interpreting NCF into practice. Additionally, I maintained a reflective journal that helped me identify and take steps against inappropriate subjectivity that may result in misrepresentation and misinterpretation of data (Maxwell, 2012; Tinker & Armstrong, 2008).

This was a single case study which was bounded by location and was limited to government schools in Kathmandu. I was able to present teachers and school leaders' experiences, perceptions, and understandings while implementing the NCF's learner-centred education within their lived realities. Although the findings are not generalisable, they are transferrable. Another limitation was that data collection took place for only 4 and a half weeks. The timing of the data collection was challenging as it occurred at the beginning of the school year. This resulted in participant selection being dependent on who the principals recommended and who was available and willing to participate. This limited the heterogeneity of participants, with a stronger female than male presence. Lastly, this case

study is limited in its scope, and further research is needed to develop the emergent findings from this study.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study sought to investigate how secondary school teachers and leaders interpreted the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) policy of learner-centred education (LCE) in their work. This chapter presents the data derived from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The data demonstrates the many challenges teachers and leaders faced in implementing learner-centred education, most notably: inadequate facilities, their perception towards the reform, their cultural assumptions and their reservations towards LCE.

The Struggles to Create a Learning Environment Supportive and Conducive to the Requirements of the NCF

A large focus of the NCF is to develop learner-centred approaches to education. This expectation implicates teachers and leaders to provide and manage appropriate infrastructure and facilities to promote more engaging and learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning. In particular, the NCF requires school leaders to develop working guidelines as a way to plan the implementation of these learner-centered spaces. However, in the participating case study schools, these expectations were not adequately addressed and at times were reduced to mere rhetoric in school policies and documents. For example, one school articulated their goal as: “Sagarmatha Secondary School will teach children in a child-friendly/child-centred environment and work toward providing the necessary infrastructure and facilities.” Yet, in the curriculum guidelines provided to teachers to enact this goal, the timeline for implementation was not stipulated, nor did it mention who was responsible for this transformation.

Hindering many of the school’s attempts to achieve LCE within the NCF was the damage and destruction caused to infrastructure as a result of the 2015 earthquake, which registered 7.8 on the Richter scale, and killed 9000 people (Ministry of Education, 2016). As

the government failed to support them directly, many schools struggled financially to rebuild (Ministry of Education, 2016). Not surprisingly, many of the schools concentrated on establishing basic infrastructure first, then on details of student learning as mandated by the NCF. Of particular focus after the earthquake was acquiring extra land to build new schools featuring rooms for sports and extra-curricular activities. Below are two images of Kanchanjunga Secondary School (left) and Sagarmatha Secondary School, which were in the process of reconstruction (see Figure 1). Construction work at the school took place within school hours so both staff and students struggled with noise, pollution and constant interruptions and movement. Consequently, it was difficult for many of the teachers interviewed to adhere to the standards of learner-centred/child-friendly spaces as mandated by the NCF.



Figure 1 Kanchanjunga (left) and Sagarmatha (Right) Secondary School, first week of new academic year.

Akanchha, principal of Kanchanjunga Secondary School and three years into her leadership role, explained:

If you'd visited the school after the earthquake, it looked like a dump yard. We literally had to start from ground zero. We have had to reconstruct the buildings, furnish classrooms. Sadly, we don't have the capacity to allow students to engage in

sports or extra-curricular activities because there's no space and we don't have the equipment right now.

Akanchha's comment was a common refrain. During the interviews many school leaders and teachers complained about the lack of government financial support and many of the school leaders had to find alternative ways to fund the developments.

With the aim to create learning environments conducive to implementing an inclusive student-centred education, many of the school leaders interviewed reached out to donor organisations to fund the construction of buildings, furnish science and computer classrooms, as well as restock libraries and school supplies. As Akanchha described in her interview:

We don't have a working budget to maintain or provide resources for the school.

Once the election took place, we chased after the local elected body and asked them for money which they took a year to approve. Then we asked the District Education Office to fund the construction of those four rooms. It took another year for them to release this money. Now we are chasing after them to build windows and doors for these classrooms. After rounds of dialogue, a local insurance company agreed to carpet our auditorium and provide us with chairs.

Given that schools were eager to receive amenities, they quickly agreed to conditions set by the donors. Rita, principal of Sagarmatha Secondary School and with fifteen years of experience outside of Kathmandu Valley, discussed the requirements for a new computer lab donation:

To equip the computer lab, we sought help from the Lions Club. They said they would only fund us if we were to contribute 20% of the cost. So, we collected money. All the staff members contributed 10% to 15% of their monthly salary to meet this target.

Rita expressed her frustration at this:

There's been so much talk about delivering a learner-centred education, and we as practitioners know what it entails. But our hands are tied. We don't have access to the proper resources and facilities that are needed to effectively engage in learner-centred education.

Below is a picture of a large notice put up in front of Dhaulagiri Secondary School (see Figure 2). The construction of the school buildings was being funded by the Japan International Coordination Agency (JICA) as aid to the government of Nepal. In her interview, Surabhi commented on how the school had very little bargaining power as JICA made all the decisions regarding the reconstruction.



Figure 2 Dhaulagiri Secondary School was being reconstructed by JICA as aid to the government of Nepal.

Fresh water supply was also an issue teachers and students had to contend with. Soumya, an English teacher with 12 years' experience stated: "We have to constantly replace the water taps as they were breaking off due to the high iron content in the water." As school principal Rita mentioned, "a local hotel's toilet facilities is used because their pipes were blocked." Her role also included maintenance of acceptable hygiene at the school because, as she explained, the "lack of a regular supply of adequate water" resulted in "dirty and smelly toilets." Below is an image of Manaslu Secondary School's (Figure 3) main water source.

Water was transported using buckets to the toilets. Children would come and wash their hands here.



Figure 3 Main water source, Manaslu Secondary School

The pressures caused by with the problematic school facilities consequently took away needed time and attention from achieving the NCF's directives. This made ensuring the provision of child-centered education more difficult to achieve.

Learning Environments Failed to Support Learner-Centred Education

Many rebuilding schools from the earthquake struggled to provide adequate learning spaces and classrooms conducive to supporting the LCE as prescribed by the NCF. The NCF directs practitioners to create “interactive and creative learning environments that stimulated children to be active learners” (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007, p. 23; Ministry of Education, 2016). To successfully achieve this requires schools to not only have fully resourced libraries, science and computer laboratories, but classrooms designed to facilitate learning, be child-friendly, and promote critical and creative thinking (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2016).

In my observations of all the participating schools, the classrooms had a similar setup. Even newly constructed buildings used the same architectural design, which was a two/three-

storied rectangular concrete building arranged in a u-shape with an open graveled space in front. In addition, every staffroom I visited had the national flag on the principal's table with portraits of the martyrs of the country and the image of the Hindu goddess of knowledge, Saraswoti (See Figure 4) as well as pictures of the massacred royal family (See Figure 5).



Figure 4 Goddess picture of Saraswati (left), a goddess associated with learning and a picture of Parvati and Ganesh, other Hindu gods (right) in the staffroom of Annapurna Secondary School



Figure 5 Painting of the late King who was killed (left) and the famous portrait of the massacred royal family (right).

In spite of a push for a more ‘secular’ learning environment by the NCF and the Ministry of Education, the influence of Hinduism was still heavily visible and integrated in

everyday practice, as evidenced by the images of the Gods and Goddesses. Big and bold images of the King and his family were also reminders that the schools continued to propagate nationalism associated with the monarchy, despite the country now being a republic.

Many of the classrooms visited had rows of long desks all facing the front of the room where a single whiteboard hung (see Figure 6). Even though some of the buildings and furnishings were new, the arrangement reflected a ‘traditional’ approach to teaching and learning; teachers continued to teach using transmissive teaching techniques basing their lessons in the textbook. As the furniture could not be moved to encourage other modes of student learning, these classrooms were not reflective of the child-centred learning spaces as articulated in the NCF.



Figure 4 A typical classroom setup prevalent in all the participating schools in both the new buildings and the old ones

Further, computers were available but not in use (see Figure 7, right), libraries were disorganised, uninviting spaces to learn (see Figure 7, left) and learning materials were locked away in cabinets and not accessible to students (see Figure 7, centre).



Figure 5 The library was being rearranged in Kanchanjunga Secondary School (Left). Computers in Dhaulagiri Secondary School stored away (Centre). Materials stored inside a cabinet in Manaslu Secondary School (Right)

The outer buildings and compound walls had images of trees and landscapes painted on them. Below is an image of the compound wall of Sagarmatha Secondary school (see Figure 10), where students painted the wall with the assistance of volunteers from Israel.



Figure 8 Painted images on the compound wall of Sagarmatha Secondary School.

Additionally, quotes that reflected the importance of education, knowledge, the value of kindness and nationalism were inscribed on the walls to motivate students and teachers. One such quote read: “The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher

demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.” This quote was above the national flag (See Figure 10) painted on the wall in Annapurna Secondary School.



Figure 9 The national flag painted on the wall below the quote.

Another quote on the wall was directed at students: “Greatness is reflected by one’s heart, not their caste”³. The quote had images of the national flower and bird - again symbols associated with national identity (see Figure 11)



Figure 10 The above-mentioned quote in Nepali depicted along with the national flower and bird in Sagarmatha Secondary School.

Although the schools attempted to make their environments more inviting and learner-centred by painting images and scribing quotes on the walls, the rigid arrangement of

³ This quote is translated from a famous poem *Muna Madan* written by one of the most prolific Nepali writers, Laxmi Prasad Devkota.

classrooms, the lack of learning materials and equipment, failed to support the LCE as specified by the NCF.

The NCF directs all teachers to employ student centered pedagogies in classes to help students become curious, involved and active learners (Department of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). During the interviews, participants spoke of how effective it was to involve students in the learning process. They also endorsed the use of a variety of teaching and learning techniques to help learners expand their horizons. Surabhi, a health, population and environment teacher, explained why she uses learner-centred pedagogies:

You see student centred teaching approaches allow students to work out solutions themselves. They engage with each other and they learn to think for themselves. You ask them ... we have changed our ways as teachers. Now we are much more interactive with them.

However, my observation notes of the classroom practices showed that many of the teachers still delivered the lessons and enacted a transmissive style of teaching. Here is an excerpt from my observation notes:

Saakar: *Today we are going to discuss the Pythagoras theorem.*

I want you to take out your copies and write down

Students take out their copies and start writing.

Saakar: *Pythagoras Theorem is a statement about the sides of a right-angle triangle is always equal to 90 degrees. The area of a square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the areas of the squares on the legs.*

On the board draws this image and writes



Lessons involved the students, but they did not co-construct knowledge. When students expressed opinions that were different from their teacher, they were ignored. Here is an excerpt from my observation notes:

All students stood up and greeted the teacher as she entered the classroom.

Surabhi: *Please sit.*

All the students sit and open their books.

Surabhi: *Let's review yesterday's lessons. Can you give an example of how technology can have detrimental effects on society?*

Student 1: *(Stands up and answers) Hiroshima and Nagasaki*

Surabhi: *Exactly, that is an example of how technology was misused. Now tell me, [pointing at student 2], how technology can be harmful to society?*

Student 2: *(Stands up) Why are we still talking about Hiroshima and Nagasaki when there was that big suicide bombing in Sri Lanka a couple of days ago?*

Surabhi: *You can't write that in your exam. You won't get the marks.*

Then she moves on to a new topic.

This shows how teachers persisted with single answers without contextualising their lessons to further build upon the knowledge or opinions of students even though NCF mandated all practitioners to do so.

Classes were predominantly textbook-focused and student activities encouraged low levels of thinking skills. Most common classroom activities required learners to answer questions relevant to a passage read in the textbook. This use of lower order thinking skills (Bloom's) involved recall, or memory work. If a student failed to reproduce the exact wording in the book in his/her response, the teacher called upon another pupil to answer correctly. The exercise of merely recalling information in a passage is common practice in a

transmissive style of teaching and failed to scaffold student knowledge, so there was minimal room for students to think critically and co-construct knowledge (as instructed by the NCF).

When students were given tasks to do in groups, their energy levels soared and their excitement for learning was regained. They huddled together to find correct answers from the textbook. Even though students were excited about their learning, teachers constantly reminded the pupils of the importance of remaining silent, even when they were discussing subject material. Soumya, a secondary English teacher said, “You are now supposed to work in groups. I have a list of words from the lesson. I want you to find their meanings from the words I have given. Use the book for reference. You have three minutes.”

Just as the students started talking amongst themselves, Soumya said, “The noise level! Keep it down!” Thus, even though Soumya sought to engage students in a learner-centred lesson, her insistence on keeping the classroom quiet ensured that her sense of authority was maintained in the classroom. Culturally speaking, teachers are expected to be in control of the learning process. Additionally, learning is viewed as a serious endeavor that cannot take place when students are enjoying themselves or when there is noise. This cultural belief contradicts the expectation of the NCF as it stipulated that classes were to be filled with joyous interaction where students were free to critically engage in the learning process (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). To institutionalise learner-centred education, the NCF makes certain recommendations, however, this requires whole school restructuring efforts, and teacher pedagogies.

Teachers Service Commission’s Recruitment System in Conflict with the NCF

Directives

The NCF requires the restructuring of schools to enable the delivery of a learner-centred education. This requirement subsequently required schools to change the education

system to a basic level, serving grades 1 to 8 and secondary level serving grades 9 -12⁴. In response to this mandate, all the participants commented in their interviews that there is confusion regarding the restructuring of the school system at government offices. All participants agreed that the restructuring had only taken place on paper and that “only the names had changed: the system remained the same” but “caused more logistical hassles and confusion.” The Teachers’ Service Commission (TSC), which was responsible for hiring teachers in Nepali schools, still recruited human resources for the old school structure, as Rita explained:

They blame us for not implementing reforms. How long ago was the school supposed to be restructured, a decade ago! They certainly changed the names, but the Teachers’ Service Commission is still recruiting teachers for primary, lower-secondary, secondary and higher-secondary level.

With the restructuring of the education system, all schools were expected to run classes through to grade 12. Saakar, a Maths teachers in Annapurna Secondary School said that “all schools told the District Education Office that they were on board” with this restructuring plan but “were putting it off every year” as it was certain that “just like other reform policies, this too would be phased out.” Also, the school leaders were unsure as to who would teach grades 11 and 12 and how they would be integrated into the current staffing system. Surabhi, a teacher of Dhaulagiri Secondary School explained:

Who is supposed to teach grade 11 and 12? Someone like me who right now teaches grade 8, 9 and 10? Or do we need a different set of teachers? Or should the teachers for grades 11 and 12 be brought on? If so, how will they be

⁴ The old education system was, primary level, serving grades 1-5, lower secondary level serving grades 6-8, secondary level, grades 9-10 and higher secondary level, serving grade 11-12.

integrated into the workforce? Who decides this? Until the policy makers address these issues, this reform will never be meaningful.

This confusion had also resulted in the curriculum remaining the same, despite implementing the NCF more than ten years ago. Consequently, “nothing had changed” and the provision of including “local curricula” and “vocational subjects” had all only “remained on paper.” This is because the schools did not have the “institutional capacity” or the “support from the ministry” to actualise this mandate. Saroj expressed his opinion regarding this matter:

It’s important to note that ideas were propounded in the NCF. The idea that secondary education should have two streams, general and vocational is commendable. So is the part of including local knowledge in the curriculum. But there hasn’t been the sustained effort required to actualise these directives. We may be blamed but until the ministry is clear, we can’t do anything about it.

Although many of these issues remain unaddressed, the disgruntled voices of the teachers about this matter demonstrate how lack of support from government bodies affecting schools’ work can also hamper the successful implementation of LCE in the NCF. While teachers are attending to matters at a school level, the District Education Office and the Department of Education at the government level are equally important in the successful implementation of the NCF.

Consequences of Switching to the New ‘Continuous Assessment System’ (CAS)

To ensure learner-centred education can be implemented, the NCF requires schools to also implement a Continuous Assessment System (CAS). CAS constitutes a variety of assessments that ensure student progress is monitored throughout the year. Consequently, schools were made to switch to letter grading instead of numbers and percentages. They were also directed to maintain individual student portfolios to monitor student learning.

Contrary to expectations, CAS was negatively perceived by the participants. Teachers and school leaders felt that they did not have the “skills or expertise” to implement CAS. All the participants admitted that they rarely maintained portfolios and assessed students using a variety of assessment techniques. Most common was assessing students through written examinations. They viewed exams as being the “most effective measure” as they “created the pressure necessary to motivate students to study.” They thought that “marks achieved in exams truly represented student ability.” It was also understood that regular exams helped students improve their test-taking skills, which was necessary to succeed in the grade 10 high-stakes board exams. Saroj, a secondary school social studies teacher, explained the importance of examinations:

You see, students will only seriously start learning when they have to appear for exams. If our students are to do well in SEE (grade ten examinations), they have to be well versed in the subject material. By giving exams, students will become used to the content and be able to do well in the finals.

Consequently, the switch to letter grading was perceived as “hasty” and “posed problems,” as teachers were not able to relate to this method of assessment, despite some training. Soumya, with 12 years of experience in teaching English, has witnessed a lot of the reforms. When asked about CAS, she vehemently responded:

CAS was implemented on paper, not in real life. Everyone knows it. We were never oriented in terms of CAS. Well, we attended one day of training sessions. It was useless. They just told us to implement it. In fact, one of the government representatives told me to make a dummy portfolio of a student employing CAS and show it to school inspectors if they asked me for it.

This opinion was shared by the rest of the participants. Additionally, teachers said that the switch to letter grades had created more problems than anticipated. They felt that the new

grading system was used to inflate student performance. This was because schools were required to send internal assessments, worth 25 % of the final grade, to the exam control section in the Department of Education. Surabhi explained:

As part of the internal assessment, all the students are now awarded 25 marks (out of 25). It's expected that we do this because it increases the average, helping in better school performances in board exams. I guarantee you that this is now a common practice in most of the schools.

The NCF's vision to implement learner-centred education through the use of CAS did not align with practice and was deemed neither plausible nor practical by the practitioners. This stemmed from their distrust regarding borrowing ideas from the 'West.'

Distrust About Borrowing Learning Ideas from the 'West'

Teachers and school leaders reasoned that learner-centred approaches were untrustworthy 'Western' ideas imposed on Nepal, and so they were not implemented effectively. In their interviews, many blamed the government for adopting this approach without considering the cultural context and the realities of their own education system. Akanchha, who worked as a school inspector before becoming a principal, explained the problem:

The proposed reforms initiated by the NCF are excellent ... on paper. The fact that the education system has to be student-centred and inclusive makes sense because the world is practising it. That's the problem you see, as we import ideas from outside because the government receives aid to do so. What does it result in? Minimum implementation because these reforms were not made for us. Just like the past education reforms, the NCF will soon be scrapped as well. You wait and watch. The system is not committed to implementing the proposed reforms. It just isn't. We are running a show for the donor community

and to a certain extent, we have succeeded in putting up this façade of reform and change, but in reality, the education system is falling apart.

Building on this level of skepticism, participants stated that a learner-centred approach reflected the cultural values and practices of the ‘West’, but not those of Nepal. Saroj, who worked as a secondary social-studies teacher in a government boarding school, stated:

Learner-centred education works in the West because the culture agrees with it. Children grow up in an environment where they are given the space to explore. Parents do not use force on them. Children are free to make their own decisions. The state protects them. Teachers only teach them. Whereas in the Nepali context, individualism and choice don’t work for us. Children’s decisions are shaped by families. They must be shown right from wrong even if that entails using force. They do not have the luxury of ‘choice’ that Western children have. As teachers, we aren’t just facilitators of the learning process, we are responsible to mould them into responsible and cultured individuals.

In contrast to learner-centred approaches, which advocate for teachers to act as facilitators of learning who encourage students to actively engage in the learning process (Lattimer, 2015; Schweisfurth, 2011), many of the teachers stressed the importance of engaging in learning “seriously” where students had to maintain a certain decorum and listen to their teachers. These comments make it clear how certain pedagogies in LCE do not correlate with their views, which position the teacher as authoritative and the student as more submissive. Teachers explained that they held a higher position in the social hierarchy because of their profession, age and life experiences. As such, they had full authority over the students. They were responsible and expected to teach students all matters including ‘right from wrong.’ Participants also spoke of instances where students became uncomfortable in lessons where they were required to generate knowledge. Surabhi described an incident in class:

The other day my students went up to the principal to complain that I was not teaching properly. According to them, the class was too noisy. I had them work in groups. I was not dictating notes in class, they accused me of not doing my job properly!

Other participants also spoke of the difficulties managing classrooms using approaches that were “so alien” to both the teachers and students. Soumya, a high school English teacher who worked in a school where the majority of the students belonged to a low socio-economic status group, explained:

No matter what anyone says, our students are used to acquiring knowledge from the teachers. They don’t have the skills or the ability to generate knowledge in class. It’s not like they aren’t smart; they haven’t been educated in that manner.

Thus, school leaders and teachers were convinced that learner-centred education did not fit the local context because it did not incorporate the Nepali cultural norms and values of respecting the elders and the traditions of how knowledge was to be acquired. Such opinions further obstructed the actualisation of the core element of the NCF reform policy.

Consequently, they were convinced that learner-centred education was not appropriate for the Nepali context. Therefore, despite the NCF’s directives to use student-centred pedagogical approaches, traditional practices continued to dominate classroom teaching. They believed that the needs of the students were much more complex and were far beyond the jurisdiction of the NCF.

The NCF Ignores the Lived Realities of the Children

All of the school leaders and teachers interviewed were of the opinion that the NCF’s objectives were too difficult to implement because it did not consider the lived realities of students. The majority of students attending the case study schools were of the lowest Social and Economic Status (SES). Despite their young ages, some worked as domestic help in

houses or in local hotels. Teachers frequently commented about how many students came to school hungry and tired. In each of my class observations, at least one student would be curled up asleep and they were not disturbed. During another class observation in Sagarmatha Secondary School, a male student had a bandaged right arm. When questioned, he claimed that he had slipped in the bathroom, but his friend interrupted and told the teacher (Rita) that he'd spilled boiling water on himself while working. Similarly, in Dhaulagiri Secondary School, two students left class in the middle of the lesson because they needed to take their parents to the hospital.

Soumya described the student situation at her school:

Some of them don't have fathers, some of them don't have mothers. Both parents of some students' work outside the country. These children are not well taken care of. They do not get to eat properly. They are responsible from a very early age to look after the family, making it difficult for them to manage time. Consequently, they often struggle to keep up with schoolwork. These children have so much on their plates, so how can the government expect them to achieve outstanding results?

The school leaders and teachers also thought that the NCF's recommendations were not applicable because the children they worked with did not belong to "good families." They said that the reforms recommended by the NCF were most suitable to children who were "cultured" and possessed "basic values" which they believed their students didn't have. Before commencing my class observations, four of the teacher participants deemed it necessary to inform me that the classes had students "from economically struggling and uncultured families." Interested to learn more about this, in my interviews with these four teachers, I asked for further clarification of cultured and basic values. Of particular importance was the fact that a lot of the students belonged to "broken and uneducated"

families. Teachers believed that the parents did not spend enough time with their children (given their situation) but also did not teach them “right from wrong.” Parents did not reason with them, they often enforced discipline with physical force. Further, they claimed that these students used “crass language and did not respect elders.”

According to the participants, given the strenuous circumstances their students had to cope with, “they grew up well before their age” and therefore were “driven by survival instincts”. Consequently, they often “misbehaved and misused any sort of freedom they got.” As Surabhi explained:

You see we deal with students who come from all sorts of backgrounds. Some children’s fathers have remarried and all of them live together in the same room. Others grow seeing their parents have sex (softly) as they live in the same room. Their families are constantly fighting and arguing. They grow up hearing and using vulgar language. A majority of these children are supporting their families financially by working. These children are so busy coping with life that they do not have the luxury of receiving the values that you and I would give our own children.

This sentiment was shared by all the participants. However, they also repeatedly blamed the Ministry of Education for devising a reform policy that “punished” these students for belonging to a low SES group. Therefore, they were convinced that the NCF and its reforms were misplaced and misguided. Saroj explained his views:

The children that we deal with are resilient and adaptable. They find ways to survive, and cope in the most difficult situations imaginable. The harsh reality is that these children don’t have the luxury to just learn, as they are often finding ways to not only take care of themselves but their entire families. So, the problem with reforms like that proposed by the NCF is that they are trying to

put them into these ‘readymade boxes’ that do not coincide with the students’ needs or circumstances.

Participants interviewed were certain that the reforms proposed by the NCF, and its attempts to implement learner-centred education, ignored the lived realities of the students, making them an unfeasible proposition. Although the NCF spoke of implementing an inclusive learner-centred education, the provisions were not effective in tackling the challenges that arose from these children’s strenuous circumstances. Participants felt that it was more important for them to fulfill their duty as “parents” to safeguard the wellbeing of the students, than simply teaching them in class.

“We are Not Just Teachers; We are Their Surrogate Parents”

Aware and sympathetic to the lived realities of their students, many of the teachers interviewed acknowledged the important role they play beyond that of being simply teachers. As Rita, principal of Sagarmatha Secondary School put it, “we are not just teachers, we are their surrogate parents.” While the NCF directed teachers to foster personalised and caring relationships with students to enhance learner-centred education, many teachers acknowledged that the bonds had been fostered long before the introduction of the NCF. Despite the personal commitment to take on many roles in their day to day work, the teachers prioritised their roles as surrogate parents over learner-centred pedagogies, not knowing perhaps that it was already a part of that. This was because parents gave full authority to teachers and school leaders to ensure that their children succeeded, not only in school but in life. Teachers shouldered the responsibility of shaping individuals who would have “good values” and were well adjusted. They admitted to doing everything necessary to take care of these students. Rita shared:

My sense of responsibility to the students is the same as that to my son. We as teachers are instrumental in shaping these young individuals. I focus on helping

nurture individuals who are well behaved, tolerant, educated and cultured. We cannot fully address all student needs, but we are trying our best. We constantly talk to them, encourage them, and show concern. We must first ensure that these students are coping well in life before we focus on their education.

Others also mentioned their duty to safeguard and protect the students. School leaders and teachers recounted incidents of how students often relied on them and sought their help during a crisis. Saroj described a recent incident with a student:

A student of mine came to school with a swollen and bruised hand. She worked as a domestic helper. Upon talking to her, I learnt that the lady of the house had hit her for waking up ten minutes late. She slowly opened up about the ordeal she was going through. Her employers deprived her of food. She started crying uncontrollably, begging me not to send her back to the house. So I cancelled all my appointments I had that day and spent the day with her. I first called the lady she worked for. She denied all claims and projected herself as the victim. Then I called CWIN⁵ who came in with the police. We sent her back to her village where her parents lived. Now you tell me how we are supposed prioritise the implementation of reforms when we have such pressing issues to deal with.

Similarly, Soumya spoke of how one of her students lived with her for a month because his father was an abusive alcoholic. Akanchha talked about giving her son's brand-new school shirt to the student because he needed one. Surabhi lent money to the student to buy school shoes. These incidents were testimony of how teachers went out of their way to protect and help their students. Teachers developed relationships with students deeper than the NCF's

⁵ Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN) is a non-governmental organisation which advocates child rights. They are one of the biggest organisations involved in rescuing child labourers. They work in close coordination with Nepal police.

directive, but they were not equating this to implementing the reform. Many saw it as their duty to be “like the students’ parents.”

This assumed parental role gave teachers and principals the legitimacy to use physical and mental punishment, when deemed necessary. They reasoned that it was to ensure students took their studies seriously and were morally upright. However, this was in opposition to the NCF directives. Surabhi explained:

It’s naïve of the government to ban corporal punishment. Yes, excessive force should not be used on students. That should be stopped immediately. But sometimes, it becomes a necessity to gently hit students on their heads or backs, twist their ears or make them do squats. This is how our children will learn their lessons when they make a mistake. It’s a necessity.

Other participants also expressed how at times punishment is needed to make students realise their mistakes. They said it was particularly necessary when students became unreasonably rigid and difficult. Saakar shared his experience of punishing students:

I had two female students. They just did not stop giggling. I asked them to become serious in class multiple times, but they just did not listen to me. They weren’t working seriously, neither did they complete their classwork nor their homework. So, I decided to teach them a lesson. I made them stand in front of the class. I gave each one a tight slap across their faces and twisted their ears. After that, the giggling completely stopped. They are now serious about their studies.

Like Saakar, many of the participants did not see any harm in using corporal punishment. It was viewed as culturally appropriate to “straighten” up their students, especially when they were acting up, or were jeopardising the family honor (*ijjat*). The Department of Education entrusted the school leaders to initiate the integration of the recommended reforms of the

NCF into daily teaching practice and organisational culture, yet school leaders struggled to mobilise and hold their staff members accountable.

Lack of Respect and Accountability Towards School Leaders

The NCF stated that principals played a pivotal role in ensuring learner-centred education was implemented with efficacy. However, school leaders found it a constant struggle to balance implementing policy and addressing the day to day challenges of managing their schools. As explained in the policy, school leaders were expected to attend to the following: equip schools with the necessary facilities and infrastructure, manage their staff members, monitor student progress, work in coordination with the SMC and maintain close relations with government offices and other relevant stakeholders. Not surprisingly, they spoke about feeling overwhelmed by their responsibilities. Rita, described her situation as a school leader:

You see, the Ministry deploys us and declares that we are now responsible to ensure the school delivers high quality student-centered education. The reality is I don't have time to focus on the quality of the education because I am so occupied trying to equip the school with basic infrastructure and facilities. I spend most of my time meeting donors and writing proposals so that I can manage the money to equip this school with basic infrastructure.

Akanchha also expressed how she spent a majority of her time ensuring that her teachers were doing their jobs. Subsequently, she admitted to paying less attention to the recommended reforms. While conducting an observation, I noticed two male teachers walking into the staffroom in Kanchanjunga Secondary School. They did not acknowledge the school leader who was sitting at the table. They looked right past her and shook hands with the male vice-principal. She asked them to meet her for a staff meeting to plan for the academic year and discuss a plan of action to expand to grade 11, but one of the male

teachers informed the vice principal, “I have a class to teach in another school so I am leaving” and walked off without looking at the principal. Figure 12 below shows how the staff room was empty at meeting time, indicating how teachers were not accountable to the school leaders.



Figure 11 An empty staffroom in Kanchanjunga Secondary School, 15 minutes after the meeting was supposed to begin.

In another instance, I had to stop the interview with Rita as she had to step in as a substitute to teach grade 9 for a subject teacher who was absent for the eighth consecutive day. Thus, in addition to managing the responsibility of running the institutions, school leaders often had no time to develop strategies to implement the recommended reforms, nor the necessary respect from staff to carry it forward.

Additionally, both school leaders discussed with me the difficulty in working with staff members who were apathetic and only came to work for a steady income. This made it problematic to introduce reforms like those proposed by the NCF that required teachers to make a paradigm shift. The school leaders claimed that the teachers suffered from low morale as they felt unappreciated. Rita explained:

I have to implement these grand reforms with a workforce that does not even believe in themselves. The state has continued to neglect us and treat us like dirt. So, these teachers are simply doing their jobs. The reforms signify nothing to them.

However, teachers who worked in other schools expressed differing opinions to explain the lack of implementation of the NCF. They claimed that their school leaders were nonchalant towards these reforms and were not putting in the required effort to strengthen the quality of education in their institutions. They spoke of how the principals were often occupied with furthering their personal interests as they were appointed leaders, “not because they were capable but because they were well connected.” Teachers also expressed how they found it difficult to trust their school leaders as they were not transparent. This was further validated as they only provided opportunities to those staff members who unabatingly obeyed them. Soumya described her school leader as follows:

He likes how things are because that means he does not need to work. The school has been running like this for the last decade and will continue to do so. He does not care about the welfare of his staff nor his students. As long as we come in the morning and sign our names, he’s happy. He will never be replaced. He is too well connected in the area. No one can touch him.

This view was in contrast from the opinions of the school leaders who felt too overworked with managing and running the schools, leaving them with no time to work on strategies to implement the reforms initiated by the NCF. Conversely, teachers felt that the leaders were not doing enough as they were busy pursuing their personal interests. This situation further hindered the implementation of the NCF.

Additionally, participants mentioned that the politicisation of teachers and school leaders, the pursuit of interests by government lobby groups and big businesses including

publishing houses, were responsible for the underperformance of the implementation of NCF reform agendas. Teachers felt that the powerplay “single handily clogged the system.”

Practitioners prioritised pursuing their political party’s agenda over their responsibilities as a teacher. In doing so, they failed to address the needs of their students or those of the school.

As Akanchha explained:

Teachers are protected by political parties. If you don’t have a political alliance it becomes difficult to get things done. Political parties do you favours. from making transfers happen to be resolving work-related issues. So, who are you accountable to, the students and the system, or to the political parties?

Consequently, teachers were often the most resistant to embracing reforms and obstructed any reforms or changes that were introduced, making the principal’s job even harder. Evidence of their resistance took the form of arriving late to work, going to class and not teaching anything and spending most of their time creating differences between colleagues by gossip-mongering. Rita recounted her experience of dealing with a resistant teacher:

There was this one teacher who was toxic and constantly posed problems to the school. So, the SMC chair and I asked the District Education Officer to have him transferred. We were informed that he was too well connected and that if he were to be transferred out, it would result in the District Education Officer losing his position.

Summary

The findings from this study strongly suggest that implementing a learner-centred education as directed by the NCF was riddled with challenges. It is clear that the implementation process was influenced by a complex interaction of different factors including the unavailability of appropriate learning spaces, practitioner’s beliefs about

learner-centred education, lack of consistency shown by government offices, the realities of the children and the challenges of mobilising staff members. Despite these challenges, teachers' and leaders' attempts at creating and sustaining a learner-centred education in their work have highlighted significant areas that need further attention by policy makers and leaders in their curriculum reform work. The implications of these findings for improving curriculum reform agendas in Nepali secondary schools are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) is an overarching policy document that provided a long-term vision for Nepali education. A component of it stressed the importance of switching to learner-centred education through curriculum reform to help improve the quality and increase the involvement of students (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007, p. 37). Using O’Sullivan’s (2002) ‘classrooms realities’ as a conceptual framework, this study sought to understand how secondary school leaders and teachers interpreted an education-based reform policy of learner-centred education and incorporated it into their work, namely the NCF. Consequently, objective and subjective classrooms realities, helped the study explore how teachers were facilitating the learning process by using flexible locally relevant content and a variety of assessment techniques that monitored student progress (Lattimer, 2015; O’Sullivan, 2002; Schweisfurth, 2011). Furthermore, this theoretical framework was useful in further scaffolding how lessons were tailored to individual learners’ needs and how they were taught to critically engage with content that was taught (Lattimer, 2015; O’Sullivan, 2002; Schweisfurth, 2011).

The findings showed a disconnect between the centralised reforms and their implementation. It demonstrated how a comprehensive curricular reform failed to be implemented with fidelity as teachers and school leaders interpreted the policy to be largely irrelevant to their contexts. Findings derived suggest that even though the policy directed certain changes, they had not materialised to a large extent. The participants ignored the directives of the NCF and continued to practice what they deemed was suitable for their circumstances. Consequently, some aspects of learner-centred education were practiced, sometimes superficially and at other times were deliberately ignored. But a majority of the recommendations were dismissed by participants citing incongruence with their contextual

realities. In synthesising the findings, seven core themes emerged. Each will now be discussed.

Disjuncture Between NCF Requirements and School Environments

Curriculum reform policies are best implemented into practice when there are appropriate physical school environments that support interventions (Murillo & Román, 2011). Through their study, Murillo & Román (2011) showed a positive correlation between basic infrastructure/facilities and quality of school/student achievement in developing countries. The lack of adequate infrastructure and facilities comes with hidden costs such as higher dropout rates (Branham, 2004), spread of diseases in schools where there are no proper toilet facilities or adequate clean water supply (Murillo & Román, 2011) and a general lower morale amongst teachers and students in school (Dearden et al., 2002; Dustman et al., 2003; Gamoran & Long, 2006).

Even though the NCF's primary focus was on reforming the curriculum, it presented a long-term vision of school education in Nepal (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). As part of its directives to implement learner-centred education, it mandated all schools to be equipped with basic infrastructure and facilities: adequate toilets, clean drinking water facilities, furnished libraries, computer laboratories, facilities to engage in sports and extracurricular activities, and appropriately designed classrooms (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). These requirements enlisted by the NCF are also perceived to be important for learner-centred education, and thus effectively engage learners in the learning process (Mathews, 2003). However, all schools in this study lacked basic facilities and infrastructure. Teachers and school leaders in Nepal felt unable to effectively implement the NCF's recommended reforms into their daily work as they were focused on managing basic infrastructure and facilities for their schools. The infrastructural crisis was particularly exacerbated by the 2015 earthquake. Teachers and

school leaders functioned like ‘street level bureaucrats,’ (Brooks and Brooks, 2019, p 15) since they received no financial assistance from the government and had to look for resources through their personal and professional networks.

The findings highlight how learner-centred education agendas in the NCF fail to consider limitations posed by available resources such as physical infrastructure and facilities (Barrett, 2007; Tabulawa, 1998). Educational policymakers assume that quality education can be strengthened by enhancing teachers’ skills, organisational culture, curriculum content and approach, and overlook the importance of ‘physical inputs and their effects’ (Urwick & Junaidu, 1991, p. 20). As demonstrated by the findings in this study, when schools lack basic resources, teachers and school leaders spend most of their time assembling resources from a variety of sources to equip their institutions with basic infrastructure and facilities (Altenyelker, 2010; Jossep & Penny, 1998). Therefore, even though the participants understood what learner-centred education entailed, they felt they did not have the conducive school environment to actualise these directives (Altenyelker, 2010; Guthrie, 1990; Mtika & Gates, 2004).

Moreover, there was very little adjustments made to existing infrastructure, particularly within the classroom, to adhere to the directives of the NCF. Classrooms in all participating schools were organised in the same manner – desks and benches arranged in rows facing the whiteboard. This static arrangement reinforced the ‘transmissive’ teacher-centered style of teaching common throughout all Nepali schools as opposed to learner-centred practice. At the same time, teachers were conscious that they needed to display child-friendly learner-centred learning environment. Consequently, as a way to bridge this gap, participants claimed that the paintings and quotations on the outer walls of the buildings were evidence of how they managed to transform their existing environments to make them more learner-centred. This cosmetic measure was an example of ‘symbolic’ reform which was

quickly implemented as schools needed to show progress to their external donors (Fullan & Miles, 1992). This is also evidence of how practitioners reinterpreted the NCF through their personal lenses (Mohammad and Halech-Jones; Park & Sung, 2013; Rogan & Grayson, 2003, 2008), resulting in a superficial take-up of the reform (Tabulawa, 2003). Therefore, in line with literature, this study showed how the implementation of proposed reforms are contingent on the availability of physical infrastructure and facilities (Gamoran & Long, 2006; Murillo & Román, 2011; Serbessa, 2006; Tabulawa, 1998; You, 2019).

Teachers' Beliefs were in Conflict with the NCF's Mandate

The NCF aimed to transform schooling in Nepal to address existing systemic inequalities (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). Implementing learner-centred education was perceived as one of the strategies to achieve this (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). Participants (teachers and school leaders) however perceived NCF's learner-centred education reform as donor driven⁶. In this, they were skeptical of learner-centred education and saw it as a Western imposition (Guthrie, 1990, 2011; Schweisfurth, 2011; Tabulawa, 2003). The participants believed that Nepal adopted this policy because they could not decline the monetary assistance that came with this reform (Keith, 1985; Regmi, 2017; Takala, 1998).

The idea that learner-centred education is a western imposition is in line with arguments put forth by scholars who criticise learner-centred approaches to education (Guthrie, 1990; Tabulawa, 2003). Tabulawa (2003) criticised International Aid organisations for coercing developing countries to adopt learner-centred pedagogies by advocating its effectiveness, even while there was no clear evidence that shows its superiority over teacher-

⁶ The participants were well aware that the NCF was developed in collaboration with the World Bank, United Nations Educational and Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United States Agency of International Development (USAID), Department for International Development (DFID), European Union (EU), Norwegian Agency for Development Coordination (NORAD) and Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) (Bhatta, 2011).

centered approaches (Tabulawa, 2003). Tabulawa (2003) viewed learner-centred education as a “political artefact, an ideology, a worldview about how society should be organized” (p. 10). For Tabulawa (2003), western policy impositions reinforce “hegemonic control that propagates the penetration of capitalist ideology in periphery states under the guise of democratization” (p.11).

The participants stated that the principles that governed learner-centered education were incongruent to Nepali culture and its value system. In confirmation of these views, Guthrie (1990) argued that experts who help developing nations implement learner-centred curricular reforms may be experts of their subject matter but are not aware of the cultural nuances in which these societies function. Learner-centred education’s emphasis on meeting individual student needs conflicts with Nepali traditional values of communitarianism that emphasise group-based learning (Cole et al., 2006; Kanu, 2005). Also, they expressed how learner-centred education’s emphasis on questioning teachers and engaging them in inductive learning did not align with the Nepali cultural norms that demanded respect and reverence to elders (Cole et al., 2006). Moreover, Guthrie (2011) argues that this Western “naïve implementation” ultimately leads to failure (Guthrie, 2011). In the Nepali context, the participants’ suspicion of the NCF may possibly be explained by the fact that INGOs, working alongside Nepali policy makers, did not factor potential cultural reactions towards the NCF (Carney & Bista, 2009; Spillane, 1998; Van driel et al., 2001),

Power Struggles in Implementing the NCF

Cultural socialisation affects practitioners’ opinions, beliefs and values (Kanu, 2005; Brook Napier, 2005). Nepal is a highly structured society (Pherali, 2013; Caddell, 2007). Subsequently, its education system is dominated by the higher caste/ethnicities, the Brahmins and the Chhettris who represent the Hindu worldview, and therefore are the most powerful and influential culture (Bista, 1991, p. 21). Consequently, the education system continued to

propagate existing hegemonic structures that benefited the Brahmins and the Chettris, leaving subcultures in the same status as before the NCF (Apple, 2004; Brinkmann, 2018; Pherali, 2013).

The NCF directed schools to ensure their environments were representative of all religions and cultures (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). Nepal was declared a secular federal republic in 2006 from a Hindu kingdom. However, this study's findings showed that schools continued to reinforce a strong Hindu national identity that was closely associated with the monarchy. For example, the wall paintings, quotes, temples, images of Hindu gods, and the massacred royal family's portraits reinforced the rhetoric of the Hindu kingdom (Pherali, 2013). This represented a 'symbolic' translation of the NCF (Fullan & Miles, 1992) as opposed to indicating a change in thoughts or beliefs. In other words, pre-NCF ideologies continued to be enforced against ministerial mandate – thereby opposing the NCF (Caddell, 2007; Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2003).

As all curricula are political (Apple, 2004; Freire, 1996; McLaren, 2000), the NCF was a 'political text' (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 246). There were multiple layers of powers at play. The teachers who were once drivers of social change (Caddell, 2007) were now expected by policy makers to unquestioningly implement NCF into practice (Carney & Bista, 2009). Yet teachers possessed the power to determine the fate of the NCF by choosing or not choosing to implement its directives (Bhatta, 2011; Margolis & Nagel, 2006).

Furthermore, the Nepali education system traditionally favours the ruling class/caste, the Brahmins and the Chettris (Bhatta, 2011; Caddell, 2005, 2006, 2007; Carney & Bista, 2009; Carney et al., 2007; Karki, 2014; Pherali, 2011, 2013; Rappleye, 2011). Even when a new curriculum was introduced in the 1980s, it continued to represent cultural knowledge that favoured those from Kathmandu, thus helping the dominant groups, the Brahmins and the Chettris, maintain their hegemonic influence over society (Ragsdale, 1989). Therefore,

the narrative of social justice, equality and representation that NCF emphasised threatened the existing hegemony of the dominant caste/ethnicity (Lawoti, 2013)

The NCF expected “immediate implementation” in 2007 with the assumption that teachers would switch to a learner-centred education immediately (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007, pp. 63-64). However, reform policies are not simply enacted; practitioners assess it, evaluate it and often reconceptualise it (Margolis & Nagel, 2006; Montero-Seiburth, 1992). A seemingly straightforward reform document can be interpreted in many ways (Fullan, 1998; Gottesman, 2012; Margolis & Nagel, 2006; Seiburth, 1992); ideally, curriculum reform should “improve practice based on what is known and what may work” (Kanu, 2005, p. 495).

As Apple (2004)’s work emphasised, curricular reform and implementation is never a neutral process. Rather, the selection of knowledge put in the curriculum is a representation of the ideals and values of those in power. Accordingly, the participants in this study did not feel ownership of the NCF, blaming the reform on the Nepali government’s inability to negotiate a more culturally relevant curricular reform with donor countries (Kanu, 2005; Rooft & Bezzina, 2018; Tabulawa, 2003). This judgement was a product of their deep-seated cultural beliefs and values of what worked and did not work in the Nepali context (Sriprakash, 2010).

Challenges of Implementing the NCF While Teaching Disadvantaged Students

The NCF stated that its primary goal was to ensure that “Dalit children, street children, labourers and workers, the poor” are given special attention to ensure that they remain in school and that the content in the curriculum does not alienate them (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007, p. 20). The NCF emphasised “provide(ing) equal opportunities to all children irrespective of their social background and capacity” (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007), yet none of the

participants acknowledged this. They unanimously expressed how the NCF was not a relevant policy because it did not consider the lived realities of the students. They claimed that learner-centred education “punished” students for their “struggles” and did not account for the everyday challenges that teachers had to face in trying to ensure their students’ welfare (Espinosa & Laffey, 2003; Gerstl-Pepin, 2006).

Teachers noted that children belonging to impoverished backgrounds are exposed to greater levels of violence, disruption and separation from their families (Evans, 2004). They stated that children who attended the schools in the study worked full-time in order to contribute to their family’s income. Children were employed as domestic help or worked at local hotels and restaurants and worked long hours and often were unpaid or underpaid (Sherchan, 2001). Consequently, teachers and school leaders prioritised taking care of their students over implementing the NCF’s proposed reforms. They took students to doctors’ appointments, looked after them, rescued them from hazardous environments, which was either sending them back to their villages or keeping them with the teachers’ families, and lending money to them. This additional burden for educators (Gerstl-Pepin, 2006), was not given due importance in the design of the NCF.

Given the circumstances of the children, participants felt that the NCF was not a good fit for their students. These perceptions were a result of practitioners’ perceptions of their students’ lived realities (Liou, 2011). The participants claimed that learner-centred education required some basic values and skills such as working independently, exploring knowledge, investing time in the learning process, being self-motivated and not guided by fear. These learning processes were believed to be accessible to only middle-class students who did not have the pressure of making ends meet like the socially and economically disadvantaged students.

Additionally, teachers claimed that these children did not have stable families that instilled these values in them. Interestingly, the teachers only identified class issues as opposed to caste-based differences (Grenfell & Jones, 2003). One interpretation of this is that this was an inherent bias that teachers exhibited towards students (Liou, 2011). This finding is in contrast with Brinkmann's (2018) study of India, which spoke of Brahmin culture in India where teachers deemed that students who belonged to lower castes did not deserve to be educated. Although the nature of differences between the caste system in India and Nepal (Gellner, 2007) may account for this finding, further exploration is necessary on how caste and class perceptions interplay in Nepal. It is important to note that on the one hand they claimed that their students did not have the "right set of values" to excel in the proposed NCF's learner-centred system but on the other hand, they were optimistic of the learners' potential and praised their resilience and fighting spirit.

The NCF directed all teachers to establish personal relationships with students based on mutual care, respect, and understanding (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). All participants had deep personal relationships with students, who they compared to their own children. Yet, they did not equate this with learner-centred education or the NCF. Teachers went out of their way to help their students, seeing it as their duty as a teacher. This point of view stems from the Hindu belief that teachers are expected to help shape the lives of their students and teaching is only one component of it (Sharma, 2013). However, even though this is a common practice, the NCF does not account for this aspect of care shown by teachers.

Teachers have the positional power to do whatever it took to ensure their students became good individuals with the correct set of values (Khanal & Park, 2016; Sharma, 2013). This included administering corporal punishment (physical and mental) even though the NCF specifically prohibited practitioners from doing so (Ministry of Education, Curriculum

Development Center, 2007). However, teachers perceived corporal punishment as an effective means of teaching lessons and of ensuring the students took their studies seriously (Khanal & Park, 2016; Mishra et al., 2010). This belief was backed by the Hindu assumption that students can only be educated under strict discipline enforced by teachers that entailed physical punishment (Khanal & Park, 2016). Teachers also believed that if students were let free, they would become disrespectful, unruly and out of control (Khanal & Park, 2016). Thus, the continued use of corporal punishment stemmed from their sense of responsibility to ensure that their students were morally upright and studied seriously, as well as from the ingrained values in Nepali society which accepted their use of force (Khanal & Park, 2016). This serves as an example of how the NCF was “hyper-rationalized” as policy makers believed it could deter teachers from administering corporal punishment to their students (Fullan & Miles, 1992). But in practice, it did not.

Challenges of Implementing Learner-Centred Pedagogy

The NCF directed all secondary schools to introduce two streams of program; the general and the vocational (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007); however, none of the participating schools had this provision. Furthermore, as part of implementing learner-centred education, it urged secondary school teachers to develop “creative, free, critical and analytical thinking in order (for the students) to cope with the national and international challenges” (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007, p. 42). This required teachers to employ a variety of learner-centred pedagogies. It asked teachers to use teaching learning activities that were interactive, explorative and innovative (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007).

In spite of the positive vision of the NCF, the policy did not take into account the instructional context of Nepali schools. Pedagogy is not a group of isolated techniques used in the teaching-learning process but reflects the culture and beliefs of not only the

practitioners, but of the wider society (Alexander, 2008). Following Hindu tradition, all lessons were based solely on textbooks (Sharma, 2013) and students were expected to produce the same answer as the text (Sharma, 2013). Even when students were given tasks to do in groups, teachers reminded them to maintain silence. This is reflective of Hindu tradition which places teachers and texts at the centre of learning (Sharma, 2013). Therefore, the findings demonstrated that in continuing their pedagogical practices, teachers ignored the NCF's pedagogical directives to a large extent.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that during their interviews, the teachers claimed that they were using learner-centred teaching methods. The teachers explained employing learner-centred education techniques because they were involving students by asking them questions and having them work in groups. Similar to Song's (2015) study from Cambodia, Nepali teachers did not realise that their reliance on textbooks meant that there was little room for students to construct knowledge. Moreover, the lessons did not help students exercise their critical thinking or problem-solving behaviours; rather, the lessons were only focused on acquiring knowledge. This meant that the participants were not following the directives of the NCF that asked teachers to ensure students co-constructed knowledge and engaged in critical thinking (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). The findings indicated that the participants reinterpreted learner-centred education to fit in their existing schema rather than readjusting their teaching practices.

A possible explanation for why teachers failed to incorporate learner-centred pedagogies is the ineffectiveness of teacher trainings they attend. All teachers working in government schools undergo teacher training (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2011, 2013). Although the Department of Education and INGOs provided trainings on learner-centred education, they appeared ineffective as teachers believed they were teaching using learning-centred instruction, but instead were continuing traditional teacher-centred instruction.

Multiple scholars (Bhatta, 2011; Caddell, 2007; Carney & Bista, 2009; Carney et al., 2007; Pherali 2011, 2013; Rappleye, 2011; Shrestha, 2008; Taylor et al., 2012) critiqued teacher trainings in Nepal for being redundant and complex. These trainings are criticised for failing to bring about behavioural changes in practitioners as teachers still lacked conceptual clarity, which is necessary if they are to implement curricular reforms like the NCF (Bhatta, 2011; Caddell, 2007; Carney et al., 2007; Pherali, 2011; Shrestha, 2008). Just as in other developing countries, many of these trainings are theoretical and teacher-driven, making it difficult for teachers to model behaviour required by learner-centred education (Mtika & Gates, 2005; Schweisfurth, 2011). Therefore, the failure of trainings to bring about changes in teachers' teaching style is another reason why NCF was not implemented into classroom practice.

Consequences of Implementing the New Continuous Assessment System (CAS)

To ensure that learner-centred education was implemented, the NCF imposed a change to the assessment system which they called Continuous Assessment System (CAS). CAS was implemented to help teachers track progress of students throughout the year using a variety of formative assessment techniques other than examinations (Ministry of Education, National Curriculum Framework, 2007). CAS demanded that teachers shift their understandings and practices on evaluating students (Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center, 2007). Implementing CAS required teachers to spend additional time at school. This was not appreciated by the participants as they often had other commitments to attend to outside school hours (Altinyelken, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2002). Moreover, even though all teachers reported attending trainings on CAS, they deemed these trainings as "useless" and not relevant to their students and teaching contexts. Furthermore, despite the NCF implementing CAS, high stake examinations continued to take place and the teachers were expected to finish content driven syllabi on time (Sriprakash, 2010; Song, 2010). This contradicted the mandate of learner-centred education.

Moreover, participants did not view CAS as a desirable reform as it did not in their opinions, carry any prospects of bringing about positive changes. Teachers and school leaders were convinced that written examinations were the most effective in maximising students' learning (Pryor & Lubissi, 2002; Ramesal, 2011). They stated how the introduction of CAS led to a loss in academic rigor as grades became inflated and no longer reflected ability. Consequently, the participants did not make the necessary conceptual adjustments required to implement CAS. This mixture of practical challenges and personal beliefs led to this NCF reform being ignored or rejected.

School Leaders' Challenges to Hold Teachers Accountable

To implement NCF, school leaders were given primary responsibility to work with their staff and strategise ways to implement learner-centred education into their schools as part of the NCF mandate. School leaders discussed the challenges they faced while working with unmotivated and uninspired teachers who had low morale (Mathema, 2007). They noted that teachers had no incentive to work towards translating a demanding policy like NCF (Mathema, 2007). As a result, the participant principals spent most of their time managing their teachers and attending to the day-to-day running of their schools.

Furthermore, school leaders from the study found it difficult to implement NCF because they claimed that their schools did not have the capacity to embrace such changes (Fullan, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2002; Park & Sung, 2013). They also felt that the ministry did not support them enough to help them implement the NCF into practice. However, the teachers felt that their school leaders were not doing enough to implement NCF's recommended changes. This lack of organisational support was particularly evident in how principals failed to expand their schools (up to grade 12) as required by the NCF as part of restructuring the school system.

The difference of opinion between the teachers and the school leaders is a testimony of how the lack of implementation of the NCF was a symptom of greater organisational issues, such as a lack of trust, capacity, and integrity (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). The school leaders struggled to hold their staff members accountable as they had no authority to act against teachers who were not doing their duties properly. This is because once teachers become permanent government employees, they cannot be fired (Carney, 2003). Whereas accountability is key for any proposed reform to be translated into practice (Leithwood et al., 2002).

Moreover, there was a general apathy reported by teachers and school leaders because they perceived that the system that was supposed to hold them accountable was broken (Mathema, 2007; Carney & Bista, 2009). Teachers and school leaders viewed the dysfunction not as a result of education policy failures but rather of the political interference in the education sector (Bhatta, 2011; Carney, 2003; Carney & Bista, 2009; Karki, 2014; Pherali, 2013). In situations where political contexts were unstable and challenging, school leaders faced difficulties in navigating highly complex and sensitive political landscapes (Brooks & Brooks, 2019). With a politically contentious reform, it was difficult for school leaders to implement the NCF into practice because of long-standing divisions, on the basis of political party alliances, between teachers and the school leader (or amongst each other) (Brooks & Brooks, 2019). Political patronage made teachers more accountable to their political party than to their school principal (Brooks & Brooks, 2019). At the same time, teachers believed that the principals used their connections to remain in power and favoured those staff members who did not question them (Brooks & Brooks, 2019). This disconnect and conflict of interests among school leaders and teachers made it difficult for reforms like learner-centred education as proposed by the NCF to be implemented.

Summary

The findings demonstrated a clear disconnect between central reform policy like the NCF and how it is practised. In this study, teachers and school leaders interpreted the reform policy as being largely irrelevant to their contexts and lived realities. Consequently, they failed to implement learner-centred education reform faithfully into their practice. The findings also provided insights that demonstrate how pivotal teachers are in the implementation process. The findings are further testimony of how policy makers failed to adequately consider teachers' 'classroom realities' (O'Sullivan, 2002). In line with O'Sullivan's (2002) research, this study "highlighted the numerous and complex 'classrooms reality' factors and their implications for implementation" (p. 233). In the final chapter I will discuss the insights and recommendations for policymakers to improve the implementation of curriculum reform policies in secondary schools in Nepal.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study sought to understand how Nepali secondary school teachers and leaders interpreted the NCF's learner-centred education policy into their work. This study was a qualitative case study that studied a typical phenomenon of government secondary schools in Kathmandu. There were six participants in the study, two female school leaders, two female teachers and two male teachers from five schools. In line with a qualitative case study, I collected data using semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and document analysis. I used an inductive and iterative process to analyse data. I triangulated data and employed member checks to ensure trustworthiness of the data. The findings demonstrated how a comprehensive curricular reform was not implemented with fidelity as a result of teachers and school leaders' interpreting the NCF as being largely irrelevant to their lived realities. Consequently, NCF's directives to implement learner-centred education did not materialise in practice to a large extent. Even when reform was implemented, it was done superficially. This case study highlighted how a complex interaction of "classroots realities" (O'Sullivan, 2002), namely participants' lived realities, influenced the interpretation of NCF's learner-centred education policies. These "classroots realities" constituted of both practical challenges (objective reality implementation factors) and beliefs and perceptions (subjective reality implementation factors) (O'Sullivan, 2002).

As demonstrated by the findings of this study, the NCF was not implemented with fidelity because school leaders struggled to hold their teachers accountable to reform agendas compounded by a deep-seated mistrust between teachers and principals. Part of the problem as identified by the participants was the politicisation of the education system, where teachers and school leaders were more accountable to their political parties than the institution. At the same time, contrary to assumptions of the NCF, the participating schools lacked the basic infrastructure and facilities that were mandated by the policy. Both teachers and school

leaders felt unable to incorporate aspects of learner-centered education as directed by the NCF as they were occupied equipping their schools with basic infrastructure and facilities.

Another reason why the NCF was not implemented with fidelity was because the participants were skeptical of the policy itself. They felt that learner-centred education did not match Nepali values of communitarianism and that it questioned the respect elders had in society. Further, the policy was incongruent to the lived realities of the students.

Consequently, participants were of the belief that the NCF did not take adequate consideration of the student population's dire circumstances. They accused the NCF of punishing the students for coming from a lower social and economic background. The participants had personal and meaningful relationships with students which was in line with the directives of the NCF but they did not equate this with the reform. Additionally, they continued to use corporal punishment despite the NCF prohibiting it, citing how sometimes it was necessary to use force to ensure students learnt from their mistakes.

The participants claimed they had transformed the learning environments to make them more child-friendly and culturally representative. However, it is fair to conclude that the participating schools in this study failed to adhere to this NCF directive; the learning environment continued to reinforce a strong Hindu national identity that was closely associated with the monarchy. The dominant hegemony seemed to still prevail despite the ministry's efforts to make the education system more equal. This manifested in teachers and school leaders continuing to practice teacher-centred and 'transmissive' learning approaches in class. Similarly, they were not practising the new Continuous Assessment System (CAS) because the participants found it complicated and contradictory to their assumptions of how students should be effectively assessed and evaluated through written examinations. Consequently, in Nepal, school reforms were interpreted and reinterpreted by practitioners and not policy *per se* (Krajcik et al.1994).

Recommendations

Curricular reform policies have to be implemented in close coordination with teachers and school leaders for they require sustained back and forth dialogue (Fullan & Miles, 1992; Montero-Seiburth, 1992; Margolis & Nagel, 2006; Rogan & Grayson, 2003; Leithman et al., 2002). Transformation of the system can only occur when teachers and school leaders believe in the proposed solutions (Margolis & Nagel, 2006). This study shed light into how using policy to inform practice in Nepal failed to be implemented with fidelity.

This study offers six recommendations for improving education policy reform initiatives in Nepal:

1. Policy makers must consider the availability and suitability of physical infrastructure and resources while drafting reforms to ensure they are translated into practice (Schweisfurth, 2013). Financial support should also be made available if possible so that teachers and school leaders do not have to use their personal networks to access resources (Jossep & Penny, 1998).
2. Policymakers must include practitioners in sustained dialogue and intervention where teachers are given the time and opportunity to reflect and find suitable ways to implement these policies in their contexts (Leithman et al., 2002). Moreover, teacher training needs to be designed that allow practitioners to reinterpret and internalise policy mandates (Krajcik et al., 1994).
3. Policy makers need to be more attuned to the high-stress contexts in which schools' function in Nepal. Practitioners often have to deal with multiple layers of exhausting challenges, by both ensuring the smooth running of schools as well as promoting the welfare of the student population (Gerstl-Pepin, 2006).
Consequently, policymakers also need to acknowledge and take into consideration the emotional toll these situations have on teachers as they have to deal with

different family contexts including child-abuse, violence and structural inequality and injustice on a daily basis (Liston & Garrison, 2000; Gerstl-Pepin, 2006).

4. To ensure that corporal punishment is not practised, policymakers need to first design interventions to help teachers reflect and change their attitudes before such reforms are implemented (Brook Napier, 2005). It becomes important to engage with them on a one-one basis and ensure they own the proposition (Krajcik et al.1994)
5. There is a need for policy makers to consider the experiences of students and how they perceive these proposed reforms to understand the effect curricular reforms have on them (Schweisfurth, 2013, 2015). Also, interventions need to be designed that take into account positive practices of teachers and work on reforms through that (Barrett, 2007; Lattimer, 2015).
6. It is important that policy makers think of strategies to help ensure teachers and school leaders reflect upon their existing biases and perceptions of different castes and ethnicities (Liou, 2011). To do so, they must be engaged extensively in open discussions. These discussions should confront them of their biases. They should also be taught of techniques to identify their prejudices and work towards overcoming these beliefs. Also, during teacher trainings and professional development plans, sessions on how to overcome one's biases must be continuously held to ensure that behavioral changes take place.

This study showed how until root problems such as lack of accountability and politicisation are addressed, no reform can actually be translated into practice (Leithman et al., 2002). The scope of the study was too limited to address other issues. Consequently, future studies may consider examining the motivation and perception towards their professions of teachers and school leaders. At the same time, studies might consider

exploring teacher-student relationships to develop a deeper understanding of what transpires on the ground level. Also, further studies may focus on trying to understand how teachers perceive caste and class and how they interact with it on a daily basis.

Brook Napier (2005) and Margolis and Nagel (2006) suggest that policy makers need to spend some time with practitioners to be more attuned to their situations. It may be that policy makers in Nepal need to consider more closely what is going on at the ground level. There is a need to find solutions that may not be compatible with global targets, but which better address the learning needs and issues of the country (Johnson et al., 2000).

This study highlighted the complexities in which curricula reforms are implemented in developing countries like Nepal. It adds to existing literature of how curricular reforms are interpreted by practitioners based on their lived realities as well as their values and beliefs. Furthermore, this study is of value in the Nepali context as it discusses the practices of Nepali teachers and school leaders as they work to implement learner-centred education in accordance to the NCF.

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Appendix A

Explanatory statement

Project ID:18193

Project title: Nepali teachers' experiences in implementing education reform policies.

Student Researcher:

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You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researcher via phone or email.

What does the research involve?

The aim of the study is to explore your perceptions of the recent reform policies initiated by the government. The study seeks to understand why and how you make the decisions that you do in the classroom. It also aims to identify and understand how your life experiences have shaped your teaching practices and perspectives if at all. In doing so, it will unravel the different factors that influence the implementation of these policies. I am particularly interested to hear your stories, experiences while implementing these policies. You will be asked to participate in an interview to answer questions regarding your experiences. The interview will be approximately 45 minutes (about three to four sessions). Some classroom observations of your teaching will also take place at mutually convenient times.

Why were you chosen for this research?

You were chosen for this research because you are a teacher at a government secondary school in Kathmandu and your work involves implementing the education reform policies to achieve a more holistic and learner-centered education.

Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research

If you agree to participate in this research, I will ask you to sign a consent form or to state your agreement at the commencement of the audio recorded interview. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time and to refuse to answer questions. All recorded interviews will be transcribed by myself.

Possible benefits and risks to participants

This will provide you with an opportunity to share your specific experiences and practices while implementing these policies. Additionally, it will contribute to studies that account for how teachers lived realities and experiences contribute to developing a holistic and learner-centred education for their students. The results of this study will uncover strengths and weaknesses of these policies which can inform future policy decision-making and direction in Nepal.

Confidentiality

The confidentiality of the data will be managed through the use of pseudonyms to protect your identity. If necessary and if you wish, I will change details about you to mask your identity. The data will be published as a thesis.

Storage of data

Audio recordings and transcripts will be stored in a password-protected folder on the researchers' computers. This data will be destroyed, all voice recordings and transcripts will be deleted.

Results

Participants can request a copy of the thesis or findings by contacting the Main researcher, Dr Fida Sanjakdar.

Complaints

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer
Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)
Room 111, Chancellery Building E,
24 Sports Walk, Clayton Campus
Research Office
Monash University VIC 3800

Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Email: muhrec@monash.edu

Fax: +61 3 9905 3831

Appendix B

Consent form

Project ID: 18193

Project Title: Holistic and Learner-Centred Education: Experiences of Secondary School Teachers in Nepal

Investigators: Dr. Fida Sanjakdar, Dr. Melanie Brooks, Pritha Dahal

I have been asked to take part in the student research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent to participate in this project.

I consent to the following:	Yes	No
Audio recording of in-depth interviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Observation of my classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Photos of school environment (not of individuals)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The investigator may use the data that is provided during this research for future research projects and publication purposes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Your Printed Name:

Signature:

Date:

Appendix C



Monash University Human

Research Ethics Committee

Approval Certificate

This is to certify that the project below was considered by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Committee was satisfied that the proposal meets the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and has granted approval.

Project ID: 18193

Project Title: Holistic and Learner -Centered education: Experiences of Secondary School teachers in Nepal

Chief

Investigator:

Dr Fida

Sanjakdar

Approval

Date: 21/02/2019 **Expiry Date:** 21/02/2024

Terms of approval - failure to comply with the terms below is in breach of your approval and the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*.

1. The Chief Investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation.
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must include your project number.
6. Amendments to approved projects including changes to personnel must not commence without written approval from MUHREC.
7. Annual Report - continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report.
8. Final Report - should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected completion date.
9. Monitoring - project may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
10. Retention and storage of data - The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of the original data pertaining to the project for a minimum period of five years.

CC: Dr Melanie Brooks, Ms Pritha Dahal

List of approved documents:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Consent Form	Pritha Dahal Consent form	29/01/2019	Final
Explanatory Statement	Pritha Dahal Explanatory statement for teachers	13/02/2019	workable
Consent Form	Consent form for Teachers	13/02/2019	Final
Supporting Documentation	Pritha Dahal Explanatory Statement for teacher with letterhead trackchanges	17/02/2019	Final
Supporting Documentation	Pritha Dahal Consent form for Teachers Final draft with letterhead and track changes	17/02/2019	final

Appendix D



Human Resource Development Centre

G.P.O Box: 158, Kathmandu, Nepal, Tel: 977-1-5542684, 5541676, 5543066
E-mail: hurdecnp@gmail.com, hurdec@ntc.net.np, Web: www.hurdec.org.np

May 10th, 2019

Certification of Transcribed materials

This is to certify that **Ms. Pritha Dahal**, undergoing **Masters of Education through Research**, has accurately translated transcribed content of six interviews carried out at various schools in Kathmandu, Nepal, under her field research work between 7th of April 2019 to 10th May 2019.

I am fully satisfied with translated text from Nepali to English.

Thanking you

