

Exploring Written and Unwritten Curricular Practices in Nepal's Community Schools: Impact on Student Outcomes

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Abstract

To effectively achieve the objective of this research, a thorough analysis will be conducted on the implementation of the curriculum in school education. This analysis will encompass both the visible and concealed components, with the aim of identifying any shortcomings in the curriculum. A study was conducted in the community schools of Kathmandu to examine the factors that contribute to the difference between the expected learning outcomes of school education and the actual results outlined in the curriculum. Throughout the investigation, students and teachers from five community schools situated on the outskirts of Kathmandu's suburbs enthusiastically took part. The authors utilized a range of methods to collect data, such as conducting in-depth interviews, leading group discussions, and making direct observations. Based on the findings of the study, it has been concluded that educational activities that prioritize the development of meaningful connections offer more benefits compared to those that hinder the acquisition of practical knowledge and skills. The curriculum provides the necessary resources to support instructional activities that are guided by instructors and actively engage learners. Students can develop essential academic and cross-curricular skills with the help of this approach. In order to promote the development of students with diverse abilities and knowledge, it is crucial for the curriculum to acknowledge the negative impact of insufficient instruction and an excessive focus on high-stakes assessments. Due to this, there has been a strong focus on instructional and learning strategies that prioritize examinations. Based on the study's findings, incorporating a diverse range of elements into the curriculum can offer students valuable learning opportunities and foster the growth of both academic and transferable skills.

Keywords: Unwritten curriculum practices, community schools, student outcomes, school curriculum, Nepalese education system

INTRODUCTION

The student body and the school itself reflect and embody the sociocultural norms of the society they serve. Students have the chance to bring their language, behavior patterns, and cultural information from their communities or families into an academic context. They gain a significant amount of knowledge from one another during this process and work together to

develop their own understanding. It is crucial for individuals to bear in mind specific fundamental principles from their education. The main focus lies not on the knowledge shared by educators, but rather on the valuable lessons learned by students and the hands-on experiences they acquire.

Acquiring knowledge is an ongoing endeavor that spans a lifetime. One can achieve this through various methods, such as reading books, researching websites, listening to podcasts, watching films, engaging with interactive platforms, and gaining firsthand experiences. There are times when we have the good fortune of discovering information unexpectedly, encountering someone or something without a specific goal in mind. Students have the opportunity to acquire knowledge that extends beyond the confines of a classroom, a textbook, or a specific educational program. Teachers and students provided data for the investigation on three different curricular methodologies. The strategies employed to generate meaning in various curricula and their subsequent impacts have been extensively examined.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are three distinct groups in which the curriculum used in schools can be categorized, as identified by Cahapay (2020). The concept of "overt curriculum" pertains to the content that is taught and acquired in a clear and direct manner. However, the hidden curriculum is not explicitly taught to students; instead, they acquire it through their own efforts. The final concept is the null curriculum, which pertains to the aspects that are not covered or absorbed. As described by Ornstein and Hunkins (2018), the null curriculum encompasses the information and concepts that have been left out. The term "overt curriculum" can also refer to the curriculum that is explicitly stated or disclosed. The curriculum covers the specific subject matter and ideas that are meant to be conveyed and understood in their entirety.

As Urevbu (1985) suggested, the explicit curriculum encompasses the course outline and the specific content that students must master (Gholami et al., 2016). An intricate and well-structured set of educational goals has been devised, with the governing bodies taking charge of creating and implementing the instructional materials and classroom activities. It provides a wide range of educational resources and interactive activities that are tailored to align with the objectives of an academic program. In addition, it is accessible to users. A thorough documentation of the explicit curriculum is provided. Crucial materials like curriculum guides,

textbooks, and syllabi offer precise instructions for teachers, students, and authorities to ensure that educational activities are well-organized, regulated, and methodical to achieve the desired outcomes.

Unlike the official curriculum, the concealed curriculum is not openly disclosed. This curriculum, while not widely recognized or formally disseminated, carries significant weight and impact in the realm of education (Sarpong & Korley, 2021). The written curriculum, commonly referred to as the overt, explicit, or formal curriculum, encompasses a curriculum document, books, films, and other instructional resources meticulously selected to support students in achieving their goals. The hidden curriculum, also referred to as the unofficial or implicit curriculum, encompasses the unintentional lessons that children absorb from their peers, society, and cultural environment.

According to Alsubaie (2015), the concept of the "hidden curriculum" is commonly used in education to describe the unspoken norms, values, and practices that exist within the system. Certain curriculum designers may overlook certain topics or ideas due to their perception of them as insignificant, unengaging, controversial, or delicate. Consequently, these topics or concepts may be omitted from the curriculum. The majority of the unwritten curriculum is comprised of underlying concepts and values. It is worth considering that the exclusion of certain classes from the curriculum may subtly reflect the underlying philosophy and perspectives of the educational institution. Students possess the ability to grasp these nuanced cues, which can influence their perspectives on what is considered important or trivial.

In their research, Yun et al. (2022) examined the impact of modified anatomy teaching schedules at Seoul National University College of Medicine (SNUCM) on students' academic performance and motivation to learn. The instruction in anatomy at SNUCM is divided into three separate sections: the torso, the head and neck, and the different limbs. The timetable featured a combination of simultaneous and alternative sessions due to the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic. The authors were tasked with delivering online lectures, conducting cadaver dissections, and overseeing written and practical examinations for three separate classes, each with an enrollment of fifty students. In light of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the findings of this research could prove invaluable in the field of anatomy education. In a recent study, Lie et al. (2020) examined the interactions between Spanish-speaking patients and physician assistant students during their clinical rotations. Following the implementation of

a required longitudinal medical Spanish curriculum, this assessment was conducted. The students praised the effectiveness of the curriculum, the chance to use Spanish during clinical rotations, the commitment of the interpreters, and the potential to utilize medical Spanish in the future. The inclusion of active learning tactics in the curriculum was greatly appreciated. These strategies encompassed feedback, role-playing, and comprehensive evaluations of the entire curriculum.

In their research, Melvin et al. (2015) conducted an examination to assess the impact of a six-week clinical rotation in Internal Medicine on the objective assessment of medical students' written communication skills. Students were provided with consultation notes prior to engaging in the instructional activities. Furthermore, following duration of six weeks, we successfully obtained an extra set of consultation notes. By incorporating a workshop where residents provide comments, the evaluation of consultation note scores in the medical student written communication tutorial is significantly improved, compared to solely relying on the student tutorial.

Yash and colleagues (2023) conducted a comprehensive study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education of internal medicine professionals. They also assessed the effectiveness of innovative approaches in this regard. Before the pandemic, evaluations were conducted through Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) assessments and written exams held in person. Evaluations carried out following the epidemic utilize online written and OSCE examinations. Feedback forms are utilized in a similar manner by both parties. Research has indicated that video recordings are just as effective as traditional lectures in achieving learning objectives. Despite the lack of statistical data, they argue that students could gain valuable experience from additional clinical practice.

Wang and McWatt (2023) conducted a thorough investigation into the factors that influence student performance in written and laboratory evaluations conducted within a human anatomy course. The results of this analysis were presented in their report. It was anticipated that placing a greater emphasis on learning and visuospatial skills would lead to enhanced performance. Research has demonstrated that visual-spatial skills have a strong predictive power, particularly in laboratory experiments. In addition, it was expected that visuospatial skills would be linked to deep learning and surface learning in different ways. This was the anticipated outcome. The findings, along with the growing prevalence of sophisticated digital learning activities in

anatomy, underscore the importance of considering both factors when assessing educational progress.

Based on the research conducted by Escribano et al. (2022), nursing students displayed a moderate level of confidence in their communication skills. Educators use self-efficacy evaluations to assess students' communication skills and their grasp of individual requirements. This data is crucial for developing effective institutional initiatives and pinpointing areas that can be improved. It is crucial to conduct a thorough evaluation that focuses on one's skills and capabilities. When it comes to evaluating the communication abilities of nurses, the Spanish version of the Self-efficacy questionnaire-12 is widely regarded as reliable and valuable.

Riopel et al. (2019) employed a meticulous methodological approach to investigate the viewpoints of students regarding verbal and written self-peer feedback systems. The students' viewpoints on receiving feedback from SPs can be categorized into four distinct groups: appreciating the patient's perspective, acknowledging the valuable role that SPs play in student learning, understanding the importance of timely, verbal feedback in promoting professional behaviors for clinical practice, and enhancing student confidence in professional behaviors. Integrating feedback from standardized patients (SPs) into the curriculum can greatly improve the skills and performance of physical therapy (PT) students.

Weiting et al. (2023) gathered a team of professionals, including individuals with autism and those without, to examine the discrimination and inequitable treatment faced by autistic students in Australian educational institutions. As a result, they suggested making changes to the curriculum and instructional methods in order to better cater to the distinct learning patterns of children with autism, ensuring that they have ample opportunities to learn. University professors should have a deep understanding of how trauma affects individuals with autism. It is crucial for universities to prioritize fostering cooperation with autistic students to create courses and support systems that cater to their distinct learning methods. University policies should place a strong emphasis on promoting diversity and inclusivity, while also considering the unique needs and support requirements of students with autism.

Another important factor to consider is the impact of cultural bias and different perspectives. The hidden curriculum, just like any other aspect of education, can have both positive and negative effects on the educational system. Identifying concealed components within the curriculum can be quite challenging, as it is often viewed as a daunting task. Nevertheless,

educators sometimes use the term 'null curriculum' interchangeably with veiled curriculum, even though they may have distinct definitions for each. In the field of education, this term is frequently employed to describe the concepts or ideas that are not explicitly taught or incorporated into a formal curriculum, yet can significantly impact students and their educational experiences. Essentially, it pertains to the content that is excluded or disregarded in educational courses.

It emphasizes the subtle cues that children may unknowingly absorb, regardless of their direct exposure to specific subjects or perspectives. A clear illustration of this can be seen in a curriculum that places emphasis on certain subjects or concepts while intentionally neglecting others. The study conducted by Kazemi et al.(2020) provides a comprehensive definition of the null curriculum, which refers to the knowledge and skills that students are not exposed to or given the opportunity to develop during their educational journey.

Within the curriculum, there are sessions that emphasize the importance of developing crucial skills needed in today's rapidly changing world. The skills showcased are strong business acumen, creativity, and the ability to work well with others. In 1985, Eisner introduced the concept of a null curriculum, making him a pioneer in this area. The null curriculum, as he understands it, includes the material, ideas, and experiences that are part of the curriculum but are overlooked by the instructor. However, it is widely recognized that both the students and the community overlook these factors (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). A thorough analysis has been conducted in academic literature to explore the null curriculum from various theoretical and practical viewpoints.

As a valuable tool, it has been utilized to improve and fortify underrepresented aspects of a curriculum. In addition, this method has been utilized to analyze, articulate, and evaluate hidden instances of curricular exclusion within the field (Cahapay, 2020). Whether in the broader goal of empowering marginalized communities impacted by external factors or in the specific effort of highlighting instances of educational disadvantage.

The curriculum, whether it is structured or unstructured, has a significant impact on the academic achievements of the students. Boateng et al. (2023) highlight the crucial role of the curriculum in influencing students' educational paths and promoting the acquisition of knowledge throughout their secondary education. The quality of education that students receive greatly depends on a carefully crafted curriculum that is expertly implemented and assessed.

However, the hidden curriculum and the nonexistent curriculum greatly influence how individuals develop their understanding on an individual level.

RESEARCH METHODS

The researchers employed hermeneutic phenomenology as the research design and implemented a rigorous methodology in this qualitative investigation. Through conducting comprehensive interviews, careful observations, and group discussions, they diligently gathered valuable information. The study included a total of twenty participants, which comprised of five teachers and fifteen eighth-grade pupils. The participants were chosen from five public schools in a neighborhood in Kathmandu. An in-depth interview was conducted using a mix of in-person and online methods. The study adhered to strict protocols to ensure that participants were fully informed, had the freedom to choose whether or not to participate, and were guaranteed complete anonymity and confidentiality. The implementation of these measures demonstrates a commitment to maintaining high ethical standards (Arifin, 2018).

Every participant in the study had the freedom to choose their participation and could withdraw at any time. Codes were employed to safeguard the confidentiality of the individuals' identities. We assured them of the sensitive nature of the matter and emphasized the importance of maintaining strict confidentiality. The acquired data underwent coding, categorization, and matrix analysis (Friesen et al., 2012). After careful analysis of the collected material and consulting relevant literature, the significance was determined.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

The explicit curriculum encompasses meticulously crafted teaching materials utilized in educational institutions, serving as the foundation for students' academic aspirations. Given the limitations, it is important to incorporate additional elements into the curriculum that may not be explicitly stated or currently exist. The overt curriculum is characterized by its inflexibility.

The documents contain the written curriculum (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). T5 clearly indicates that high-stakes testing is the primary emphasis.

The acquisition of information and skills by students is of little significance; what truly matters is how well instructors prepare them for high-stakes testing and the grades they ultimately receive. The satisfaction of parents and authorities is directly linked to the academic performance of pupils. In spite of their reluctant acquiescence, the students are tired of the repetitive nature of memorizing information by heart. As a result, the strict structure of the curriculum limits students' capacity for creative and critical thinking, leading to a more rigid and standardized approach to education. One downside of a written curriculum is its narrow scope.

The evaluation process is heavily influenced by standardized assessments, often resulting in the oversight of other crucial abilities, including social-emotional, creative, and practical life skills. Given the importance of students' scores in evaluating our teaching, teachers feel compelled to prioritize exam-oriented memorization to ensure the development of practical skills. The written curriculum is outdated and primarily serves the interests of those in positions of power. Despite the absence of intentional design, deliberate instruction, or formal assessment, the null curriculum significantly impacts students' educational attainment.

This text fails to acknowledge the importance of equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills to develop their analytical thinking and understanding of the world. It is important to consider the experiences, history, and achievements of all populations in order to avoid unintentional cultural bias. It might be missing a wide variety of viewpoints. The third aspect involves fostering awareness and honing critical thinking skills. It restricts students' access to a wide range of perspectives and alternative concepts, thereby hindering their capacity for critical analysis. Another important aspect to consider is having a broad understanding of global and social issues.

The curriculum intentionally restricts students' exposure to a wide variety of subjects in order to foster a sense of civic engagement and global awareness. The sixth factor of the null curriculum focuses on the cultivation of skills. The written curriculum fails to address important aspects such as digital literacy, emotional intelligence, and practical life skills, instead focusing solely on academic proficiency. In addition, it fails to consider important aspects of students' growth both professionally and emotionally. The final aspect relates to how it influences choices

in one's career. The comprehensive curriculum does not cover subjects related to specific careers.

When students are given the opportunity to access courses and material that align with their chosen profession, they acquire valuable knowledge about various career opportunities. Many students do not receive adequate training to effectively express their concerns about the inappropriate behavior of their seniors, superiors, or other respected individuals. Not everyone universally teaches or learns the concepts of "mistake is a mistake that should be quoted and discouraged" and "wrong is wrong," suggesting that they may not be applicable to all individuals. Students are expected to follow their professors' instructions rather than giving instructions themselves.

Considering the aim of critical pedagogy to empower and educate individuals regardless of their gender, social class, color, etc., it is crucial to eliminate harmful behaviors to enable students to create authentic meaning (Alikbari & Faraji, 2011). To truly empower ourselves, encourage creativity and imagination, and promote conscientiousness, it is crucial for students to express their disagreements and bring attention to any misconduct by administrators and seniors. Nepal's current curriculum has not met the public's demand for high-quality education.

It is crucial for relevant authorities to have a deep understanding of the null curriculum and strive to establish a more diverse and inclusive educational environment. In order to maintain a well-rounded and dynamic learning environment, it is crucial to consistently evaluate and update the curriculum to include a wide variety of subjects and viewpoints. According to Ornstein and Hunkins (2018), the components and values that are missing from the curriculum, also known as the null curriculum, can have a profound impact on students' worldview, moral development, and overall educational experiences. Unintentionally, students may absorb information from material that has not been explicitly taught.

The omission of certain subjects or viewpoints from the curriculum can have a profound impact on children's ability to gain knowledge and develop their own perspectives. Accidental learning has the power to shape people's perspectives and beliefs. The lack of curriculum can be viewed as a reflection of cultural biases and deeply ingrained ideologies within the educational system. It is important to include a wide range of historical stories and cultural perspectives in the curriculum to ensure that students develop a well-rounded and unbiased perspective on the world. As a result, it helps students become familiar with cultural norms and values.

The educational system has the potential to perpetuate existing societal norms and power systems through the exclusion of certain courses. For instance, the perpetuation of existing inequalities may be aided by the lack of conversations surrounding diversity and inclusion. In order to foster critical thinking and comprehension, enhance life skills, and promote personal growth in children, it is crucial for educators and policymakers to recognize the significance of the null curriculum and purposefully determine its content. Promoting critical thinking, acknowledging cultural biases, and embracing diverse perspectives can all enrich students' educational experience, offering them a well-rounded and inclusive learning environment.

DISCUSSION

The curriculum in schools has a wide range of consequences on students, teachers, and society as a whole. It greatly impacts the social interactions among students and has implications for various aspects of their educational experiences and academic achievements. This approach fosters the cognitive development and academic achievement of students. The curriculum plays a crucial role in determining students' learning outcomes and influencing the methods and content of their education. To optimize academic performance, it is crucial to develop a system that prioritizes targeted learning goals, captivating instructional resources, and efficient evaluation techniques.

T5 asserts that the widespread use of high-stakes testing has a significant impact on the current curriculum, prioritizing test-taking strategies over practical real-world knowledge. Many individuals and organizations place a strong emphasis on academic achievement over the cultivation of cross-cutting skills in children. When creating a curriculum for cognitive development, it is crucial to structure it in a manner that fosters students' creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and overall cognitive advancement.

The current curriculum could benefit from incorporating more practical experiences for students. This would help them bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and real-world applications, allowing them to apply their knowledge in practical situations. The curriculum greatly influences the social and emotional development of young individuals. Despite the curriculum's aim to foster social and emotional skills like empathy, communication, and resilience, S5 describes their educational experience as disheartening, apathetic, and lacking personal engagement.

To achieve academic success, I place a strong emphasis on memorization to secure good grades. The fear of facing criticism, insults, and social exclusion drives me to prioritize this approach. This excessive emphasis has led to a decline in student motivation and a stifling of their ability to think critically and express their creativity. To ensure that students develop a well-rounded set of skills, it is crucial to have a provision that promotes inclusive practices in both policy and practice. This requires addressing the explicit, implicit, and absent curricula in a thorough and comprehensive manner. Integrating subjects like social justice, diversity, and mental health into the school curriculum is essential for cultivating a greater sense of self-awareness and empathy among students. Being well-prepared for upcoming events is an essential part of the process. The curriculum should incorporate instructional activities that equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate a dynamic and interconnected world. This includes all the educational experiences where students are under the direct supervision and guidance of instructors (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). The current curriculum fails to adequately bridge the gap between academic knowledge and the skills required in a rapidly evolving world. One of the key outcomes of the curriculum is to ensure the preservation of inclusivity and fairness. Despite its stated aim of promoting fairness and inclusivity, the current curriculum has not effectively addressed the educational disparities that exist.

The curriculum is designed to tackle disparities in academic achievement and promote educational equity by ensuring inclusivity, cultural responsiveness, and accessibility for all students. The curriculum, shaped by prevailing beliefs (Monchinski, 2008), still falls short in empowering marginalized and disadvantaged individuals. In order to accomplish this, it is anticipated that the curriculum will support student-centered learning activities that require strong leadership skills. Developing professionally as a teacher is essential for effectively planning and executing educational events. Teachers' opportunities for ongoing development have not empowered them to design and implement instructional initiatives that actively involve students and foster student leadership. It is crucial to enhance and update the current curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The school curriculum in Nepal faces difficulties in achieving its objectives due to insufficient curricular practices and a lack of resources for teacher development. The approach has incorporated learner-led and student-engaged activities; however, it still maintains a teacher-

dominated perspective and places high importance on high-stakes evaluation. The education authorities have failed to prioritize the promotion of effective educational methods that adequately prepare students with the essential skills. They were not properly acknowledging the importance of veiled or null curriculum.

Based on common beliefs, it is the role of the local government to create and manage the environment in accordance with the principles of the hidden curriculum. School curricula encompass a wide range of knowledge and skills that go beyond what is taught within the classroom walls. Students who are required to participate in rigorous, exam-oriented memorization and follow a written syllabus may find themselves unprepared for the rapidly changing global landscape of the twenty-first century. Throughout the development process, it is crucial to consider the changing needs of society and learners, ensuring that every student has the chance to achieve their full potential.

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