Applying a 'Contexts of Influence' policy analysis model to education in Nepal

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Abstract

This paper draws upon a wider study deploying a 'Contexts of Influence' policy analysis framework applied to a developing nation—Nepal. The specific focus of the investigation was a policy into practice analysis of civics and citizenship educational curriculum goals. Themes around teaching and learning related to national identity, democracy, cultural diversity and global education were explored at the macro, meso and micro policy levels. The paper identifies some gaps and tensions in policy making in Nepal within and between the contexts of influence, text production and practice. The findings of this paper indicate that the relationships between the various contexts of influence in Nepal are not quite as dynamic as in some other studies that have applied the policy cycle model. There is an asymmetry of power with the policymakers in charge. The paper reflects upon how both textbooks and teaching practice might benefit from a greater sense of agency and empowerment in order to stimulate more creative and multi-perspectival classroom practice.

Keywords

Education policy; Nepal; contexts of influence; civics and citizenship education

Introduction

The contexts of influence educational policy analysis framework created by Bowe et al. (1992) has had ongoing importance since its introduction (Ball, 1998; Braun et al., 2010; Braun et al., 2011; Gewirtz et al., 1995; Ledger et al., 2015). The policy cycle approach that these scholars outlined, applied and developed over time consisted (in the first instance) of three contexts: the context of influence, the context of text production and the context of practice. The macro-level incorporated national policy framing contexts; the meso-level concerned intermediary contexts (for example, textbook articulation of curriculum aims); and the micro-level referred to enactments of policy by schools and teachers. This school of researchers conceptualised a non-linear, dynamic process of educational policy as both text and process across three interactive contexts.

In the context of exploring educational policy in developed countries, Ball (1994) described the policy as follows:

> Policy is … a set of technologies and practices which are realized and struggled over in local settings. Policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended. Policies are always incomplete in so far as they relate to or map onto the 'wild profusion' of local practice. Polices are crude and simple. Practice is sophisticated, contingent, complex and unstable. Policy as practice is 'created' in a trialectic of dominance, resistance and chaos/freedom. Thus, policy is no simple asymmetry of power. (pp. 10–11)

This paper draws upon a wider study deploying the original contexts of influence policy analysis framework applied to a developing nation—Nepal. How apposite is Ball's characterisation of education policy in the Nepalese context? Specifically, the study constituted a policy into practice analysis of civics and citizenship educational curriculum goals for 9–13-year-old students. The three research questions around these contexts and levels of the policy cycle model were:

1. What have been the main policy drivers and national political, cultural and social factors at the macro context of influence contributing to curriculum reform in the context of civics and citizenship education in Nepal?
2. How are the themes of national identity and democracy, cultural diversity and global education communicated through the content of textbooks at the meso context of influence?
3. What are the perceptions of social studies teachers with respect to teaching and learning about national identity and democracy, cultural diversity and global education themes at the micro context of practice?

Some of the findings of a wider doctoral study are shared in this paper for their usefulness in throwing light upon the contexts of the influence policy cycle model and notions of power at different stages of policy implementation in Nepal.

Background to the study

Stephen Ball and his colleagues saw the educational policy as both cyclical and generative. A policy cycle approach "employs a cross-sectional approach by tracing policies from their formation through to implementation stages and analyses all levels of the policy process" (Maguire & Ball, 1994, p. 269). The context of influence is where interest groups, institutions and parties struggle to influence the construction of policy discourses in terms of what is included or excluded. Textbooks represent policies in the context of policy text production while policies are subjected to interpretation and recreation within the context of practice (Vidovich & Series, 2002). Bowe et al. (1992) argued that the artificial separation of policy generation from implementation, and an over-emphasis upon the former at the expense of the latter, could result in an over-simplified model of the policy process that fails to reflect the complexity and 'messiness' and indeed 'lossiness' (Trowler, 2003) of policy implementation.

The correspondence between curriculum policy and practice is never 100 percent, as the intentions of curriculum planners are renegotiated, subverted or domesticated by, for example, regional educational leaders, textbook writers, principals, teachers and students. Taylor (1997) argued that the policy cycle approach provides a convincing basis for policy analysis since the approach is positioned at the juncture of knowledge and power. As Maguire et al. (2015, p. 486) observed, "recognising that policy enactments are multi-layered and messy may help in understanding the complicated relationship between making policy and practising policy in complex situated contexts like schools". Policy is not only susceptible to a variety of interpretations but also empowers different organisations, groups and

people in different ways, depending "upon the possibilities and the limits of particular contexts and settings" (Bowe et al., 1992, p. 12).

The success of studies adopting a context of influence framework in a range of developing country contexts offered some convincing evidence that the approach could usefully be employed in the context of Nepal. For example, Lopes (2016) found the policy cycle approach to be a potent model in the study of curricular and educational policies in Brazilian contexts. Mainardes & Gardin (2013), who also lauded the influence that Stephen Ball had had upon policy sociology in Brazil, nonetheless noted that the contexts of influence policy approach operated differently in a developing country like Brazil than in the developing world: "Having a much more centralized state and a very different relation between civil society and the state creates interesting questions for the policy cycle approach" (p. 261).

The analytical framework was picked up and applied in a number of other developing countries. For example, Jammeh (2012) utilised a policy cycle approach in his curriculum policy research in the Gambia and acknowledged its suitability to explore the different policy contexts and their relationship. Similarly, Ledger et al. (2015) deployed the framework in the Indonesian context and argued that the approach provided a comprehensive framework for policy analysis "to gain a better understanding of the educational policies informing curriculum policy in both 'international schools' and 'remote schools,' and the interconnectivity that might exist between them" and acknowledged it as a powerful framework for its ability to recognise the "multi-layered and value-laden nature of policy" (pp. 1–5).

In later iterations and explanations of contexts of influence analysis, Ball (2012) argued that education policy analysis should look beyond the traditional territorial focus upon the local and the national, to include transnational and global influences. Ball modified the approach by adding two further contexts—the context of outcomes and the context of a political strategy (Ball, 1994). The context of policy outcomes is concerned with the impact of policies on existing social inequities while the political strategies context related to overcoming inequalities in the policymaking process (Vidovich 2007, 2013).

Nepal is a small landlocked, mountainous country with an area of 147,181 square kilometres (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2014). The country is rich in topographical, climatic, religious and population diversity. Within the population of 29 million people, there are 125 ethnic groups and 123 different languages spoken in Nepal (CBS, 2014). Nepal has made significant progress in terms of reducing poverty and improving the indices of human development. For example, it was the first country to achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals to reduce extreme poverty before the designated period (Damir et al., 2017). A majority of people (more than 75%) live in rural areas and the overall literacy rate is 65.9 percent (CBS, 2016).

Historically in Nepal, educational policies, such as the Nepal National Education Planning Commission 1956, National Education System Plan 1971 and the National Curriculum Framework 2007, have been seen by policymakers as a key medium to promote the allegiance of students to rulers, country and the governance system (Caddell, 2007; Onta, 1996). There has been strong international interest in Nepalese education related to its political transformation from a monarchy to a federal republic and in Nepal's restoration of political stability following its civil conflict and 'People's War' from 1996–2006 (Pherali, 2011; Shields & Rappleye, 2008; Standing & Parker, 2011; Valente, 2013). The existence of inequalities in education was one of the factors contributing to the decade-long armed conflict in Nepal, which further damaged the performance of public schools in the country (Carney & Bista, 2009). The World Bank has often assumed a leadership role in shaping educational plans and policies in Nepal (Regmi, 2019). This is an example of the influential role that international organisations can play in setting policy agendas for national policy making.

Nepal faces the same dilemma of many Asian countries as to whether to follow the established policy ideas and predominantly neo-liberal practices of the international community and its educational agencies or to retain and develop more distinctive and indigenous models of education consistent with more uniquely Nepali national ideals and culture (Lall & Vickers, 2009). There is a contrast between

the influences of uncritical state-centric patriotism (evident, for example, in China and Vietnam) and pro-Western neoliberalism (seen in some ways in Hong Kong and Singapore—at least in the first decade of the twenty-first century) (Han, 2007; Lall & Vickers, 2009). Both sets of ideological influences are alien and unhelpful models for Nepalese policymakers to accommodate within a Nepalese variant of civics and citizenship education.

Methodology

Primary data for this qualitative research were collected through semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, while documents, including relevant policy, curriculum, textbooks and government reports, were utilised for the secondary data. Teachers who were teaching social studies in Grades 5–7 were interviewed to understand their perspectives on the research questions across the three contexts of influence, whilst relevant policy, curriculum, textbooks, journals and government reports were utilised for the secondary data. The first and third research questions were addressed through deductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of curriculum policy documents and teachers' interview data, while the second research question was addressed through qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012) and visual analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) of social studies textbooks.

The selected social studies textbooks are published in Nepal and are widely used in public schools by Grades 5, 6 and 7 (CDC, 2016, 2017). The same textbooks are used in public schools throughout the country regardless of geographical and cultural differences. A coding frame was developed by following a qualitative content analysis sequence of steps. Sixteen teachers across six schools (9 female and 7 male) who were teaching social studies in Grades 5–7 voluntarily participated in semi-structured interviews to understand their perspectives on a range of issues around social studies curriculum aspirations and practice. The schools were chosen based on their location (rural and urban areas of Lalitpur and Kathmandu districts) and the availability of teachers for the interviews. Of the six schools, four were public schools (2 rural and 2 urban) and there were two private schools (1 rural and 1 urban).

A multi-dimensional interconnected policy cycle analysis model (Figure 1) introduced by Ledger et al. (2015) was adopted (with minor adaptations) as a conceptual framework to analyse the contexts of the influence model in the Nepalese context. They categorised major enablers and restrictions in the policy cycle into five themes—people, place, philosophy, processes and power (the '5Ps') across four levels of the policy cycle. The model shows interlinkages of processes across levels, contexts and the '5Ps'.

Figure 1 has three major dimensions: a) policy contexts b) policy levels and c) policy threads. The concentric circles span global (or macro) to local (or micro) 'levels' of the policy cycle approach. The dissecting (horizontal) band represents the policy 'threads' that intersect across all levels and contexts of the policy processes. The policy threads, denoted as the '5Ps', act as enablers and constraints along the policy cycle from global to local implementation level and are seen as interconnected and interdependent. They cut across the policy cycle through the different levels and contexts as the curricular influences are understood in the context of Nepalese civics and citizenship learning (Ledger et al., 2015).
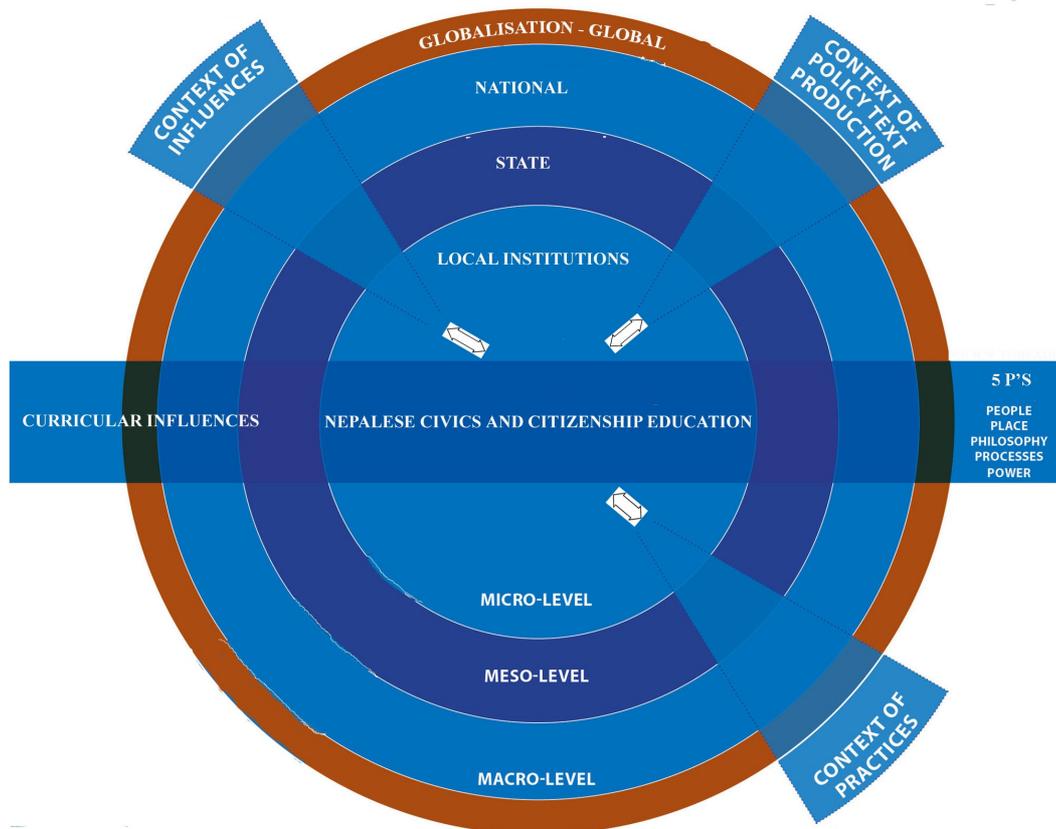
Figure 1.   Conceptual framework for analysing contexts of influence in Nepal around civics and citizenship education policy and practice.

Note. Adapted from *International and Remote Schooling: Global to Local Curriculum Policy Dynamics in Indonesia* by S. Ledger, L. Vidovich, & T. O'Donoghue, 2015, *Journal of Happiness Studies, 24*(4), p. 701. Copyright 2015 by The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher.

Findings

The 'macro' context of influence and curriculum reform around civic and citizenship in Nepal

The power of central government—as exercised through the relevant Minister for Education and the Ministry of Education in Nepal—has generally operated at the macro-policy level of big picture strategy and of ensuring appropriate resourcing of education. There is a Nepalese national curriculum framework (dating back to 2007) and there are central government guidelines suggesting curriculum aims and content, but there is still some flexibility of interpretation as aspirations for social studies and civics and citizenship education in Nepal come to be articulated through the meso and micro levels of policy implementation. As Foucault (1997) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) have illustrated, power is omnipresent and power relations are a fact of life; power dynamics are deeply embedded in how change occurs in educational contexts.

   Stephen Ball (1998) recognised that policy problems and solutions are invariably re-contextualised and re-framed within national policies and practices. Unsurprisingly, this is also the case in Nepal. There is evidence of a distinctively Nepalese meta-narrative about the intended role of schooling, the curriculum and social studies in the educational development of human capital to increase the productivity, competitiveness, stability and integrity of the Nepalese nation. Creating a harmonious society where people, irrespective of their differences in caste, religion, ethnicity, culture or language,

can live in harmony by mediating their differences is another focus of the policies. The aim of educational policies in the context of Nepal has prioritised the maintenance of social order and citizens' loyalty towards the country's rulers (Davies, 2008; Frazer, 2008).

In an era of globalisation, the Nepalese government recognises the importance of being "open to social equality and justice, to help create an inclusive society and to educate 'creative', 'self-confident' and 'globally competent' young people" (Curriculum Development Centre [CDC], 2007, p. 31) while also struggling to maintain the officially endorsed paternalistic South Asian values around family, village, community and national pride (Pradhan, 2018). There is an-built tension between these goals. In curricula terms, the change contributes to the curriculum and textbooks containing a pragmatic combination of progressive and conservative 'socialising' ideas. Ho (2018) observed that despite prioritising global citizenship themes in East and Southeast Asian nations, the discourses of civics and citizenship education and social studies education were "still very much focused on enhancing national economic productivity and maintaining the global status of the nation-state" (p. 92). Consistent with this assessment, the 2007 Nepalese educational goals—still extant in 2021—articulate aims to "develop and prepare human resources to build the nation by assisting the modernisation of society" (CDC, 2007, p. 31) and educate 'productive' citizens "capable of the international job market if required" (CDC, 2007, p. 32). Poudel (2017, p. 9) confirmed that the main aim of social studies education in Nepal is "to produce citizens who are loyal to the nation and democracy and aware of their responsibility towards the social and natural environment".

The analysis of historical and contemporary curriculum policy documents indicated policymakers' vision to promote national identity and unity by placing a high emphasis on language as a unifying mechanism. The language of ruling elites—Nepali—was promoted as an official and national language while the regional languages of all other ethnic communities (Bhattachan, 2012) were neglected in education and schooling. The post-2007 policies such as the National Curriculum Framework 2007, the School Sector Development Plan 2016 and the social studies curriculum, however, recognise the importance of mother language in teaching, and support providing primary education in mother languages to improve the quality of education and promote social harmony and national integrity in the country. The findings also revealed that recognition of the socio-cultural, ethnic and caste diversities in the country played an influential role in shaping educational policies.

It is possible to transform from a largely socialising curriculum designed to foster 'informed citizens' loyal to those in power to a curriculum that fosters reflective and critically capable individuals extending beyond passive acceptance of the existing social structure. In Taiwan, for example, there has been a "switch from a collective and nation-centred configuration to an individual-oriented and humanistic construct. The goal to produce submissive and obedient citizens … has gradually been eliminated through the series of education reforms since the 1980s" (Hung, 2019, p. 73). Nepal is relatively near the start of this narrative arc of change.

The 'meso' context of influence around the policy text production

As mechanisms of socialisation and "as sites of ideological discourse, textbooks introduce young people to an existing cultural and socio-economic order with its relations of power and domination" (Crawford, 2000, p. 1). Textbooks are a powerful conduit at the meso level of policy enactment in Nepal. "They reach all corners of a country and find their way into schools and into the hands of teachers, principals, students, and parents" (Smart & Jagannathan, 2018, p. x). Since textbooks in Nepal are both published and approved by government bodies, textbooks are the bearers of officially approved messages. They carry the power and authority of validation and play a determining role in deciding whose knowledge is of most worth and whose knowledge is marginalised (Apple, 1996).

The analysed textbooks portray an idealised and theoretical representation of the country's diversity and learning about elements of politics and democracy. The idealisation was particularly apparent in the visual images deployed in the student texts. The textbooks represent Nepal's homogeneity, social and religious harmony, national integrity, and inclusiveness as assets in enabling Nepal to achieve social cohesion, peace and unity in the country. Unity among diversity has been defined as a characteristic feature of Nepal but clarity on "how diversity is actually to be dealt with and in what image unity is to be constructed" (Caddell, 2007, p. 23) is missing in the textbooks. They portray exclusively positive aspects of the country's socio-cultural, ethnic and religious diversities as different flowers grown in a garden. However, high caste groups belonging to the Hindu religion have been accumulating power and privilege in Nepal and, as a result, groups such as Dalits, Muslims, Madhesis (people from the plains region) and women have often been excluded from the mainstream of development (Marit & Aasland, 2016; Novelli & Smith, 2011; Paudel, 2016). The textbooks largely failed to discuss underlying inequalities, discrimination and economic hardships of these groups, or open up dialogue about possible pathways towards a more equitable Nepal.

The context of text production in Nepal—specifically the textbooks used in Grades 5–7 Nepalese classrooms—were not found in this study to be a site of resistance (as Ball posited) but of relative compliance and intentional stability. Textbook writers in Nepal are relatively powerless and circumscribed. Factual approaches and continuity are safer approaches to adopt in terms of securing approval from textbook committees than innovation or the opening up of issues that might be deemed controversial or contested. Thus, the textbook policy at the meso level of interpretation follows 'macro' education policy very closely and in a spirit of compliance.

Whilst acknowledging the scope for the individual and collective agency, there is also the need to recognise that policy responses at the meso context of text production are also shaped by wider structural factors and these circumscribe the capacity of individual actors to shape policy. Textbook writers may seem to have the potential power to transform values into practice as they translate the multiple goals of social sciences education into more concrete forms, but they operate within relatively narrow parameters. Caution in meeting the expectations of political, educational, community and parental stakeholders inevitably means that changes to textbook contents and interpretations are likely to be incremental. Continuity is more likely to be favoured over change. Knowledge, facts and information about civic, political and legal structures are safe; the encouragement of critical thinking, the articulation of multiple or contested perspectives; the acknowledgement of argument and dissent are more potentially controversial.

A perhaps unstated ambition of the textbooks is that they seek to nurture Nepalese citizens who have adopted the values and appropriately responsible stances approved by the state—not dissimilar to the situation found to be the case in Iran (Kaya, 2019). When the textbook becomes the centre of class activities and pushes teacher agency to the margins, it can have negative effects in respect to students' learning as analysts of Turkish textbooks observed (Ceyhan & Yigit, 2003). In some cases, Nepalese teachers may display such deference that the writer of the textbook they use is secretly in command of the class similar to the case in Turkey (Küçükahmet, 2004, p. 11). Some of the Nepalese teachers interviewed did convey a slight over-reliance upon the textbook as the main curriculum guide.

Ball (1994) noted that "discourses are about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority" (p. 21). Nepalese textbook writers may not feel that they actually have that much power and agency in their role. They are more like a link in a chain of compliance. Sometimes power can be quite subtle (Lukes, 1974); power is also the capacity to shape how a particular agenda is perceived and how policy 'problems' (in this case the Nepali national identity, democracy and cultural diversity narrative conveyed to Nepali young people as part of their civics and citizenship learning) are presented and defined. Policy 'solutions' are shaped decisively by those who can define the problem and set the parameters within which solutions might be considered possible. Put bluntly, this means that textbook writers do not yet feel empowered in Nepal to open up the 'critical

thinking' and 'multiple perspectives' box in their organisation of the civic narrative to which Nepali young people are exposed.

The 'micro' context of influence around the practice of social studies teachers

The role of teachers in implementing education policy and influencing student learning processes has been recognised as "the centrepiece of educational change" (Schmidt & Datnow, 2005, p. 949) and educational change depends on "what teachers do and think?" (Fullan, 2007, p. 129). There is thus at least potential scope for Nepalese teachers to exert some element of agency over the implementation of policy within the context of practice. In determining educators' responses to policy there is (or at least should be) "creative social action, not robotic reactivity" (Ball 1994, p. 19). Interviewed Nepalese teachers demonstrated clarity on the potential of their role in teaching politics and democracy and the importance of young people understanding politics and government to support the democratic process. However, there was no sense of "wild profusion of local practice" (Ball, 1994, p. 10) or freedom as Nepalese teachers talked about their social studies teaching.

The findings of the analysis of perceptions of social studies teachers show that the teaching and learning of social studies explicitly aimed at developing 'Good Citizens' who demonstrate morality, responsibility, social and family values and have strong positive feelings about the development of the nation. As one teacher put it:

> We need to develop good citizens in the country who preserve our national culture, understand geography and global issues. It is a good citizen who builds the nation and the social studies curriculum and textbook are highly supportive of this. (Female Grade 7 teacher)

There was corroboration from another teacher: "The study of social studies imparts the knowledge of Nepalese diversity among students, enables them to live in harmony and helps to develop them as good citizens" (Female Grade 6 teacher). This finding is consistent with a national objective of education "to help prepare citizens with good conduct and morals to contribute to a healthy social and collective life" (CDC, 2007, p. 31). Another teacher participant commented: "It is very important to develop morality among students, and social studies as an integrated subject has focused on behaviour change and developing students who are aware of their responsibility and possess social and family values" (Female Grade 6 teacher).

These views by the teachers can be understood from the standpoint of moral self-cultivation in the context of a rich Asian tradition, "where being a good person is requisite to being a good citizen" (Sim & Chow, 2019, p. 477. Also, Lee, 2012).

Contrary to the argument of Stephen Ball and colleagues, Nepalese teachers did not articulate a complex self-understanding of their role in enacting the social studies curriculum. As one teacher put it:

> The textbook is a part of the curriculum, so we take the curriculum as a base but focus mostly on the textbook to deliver our lessons. If we feel like something is lacking in the textbook, we refer to external resources. Our focus is to look for an objective and achieve it. (Female Grade 7 teacher)

Ball et. al. (2012) observed that "the teacher is enrolled into grand political narratives of policy which link their classroom work with students to the processes of globalization and national economic competitiveness" (pp. 72–73). Yet there was little sense of agency or interpretation in the interviewed Nepalese teachers' responses to how they enacted and made pedagogical choices in their teaching of social studies. They were deliverers of the specified curriculum and generally trusted the social studies textbooks that constituted their dominant teaching and learning guides. The findings corroborated the

recent work of Subedi (2020) who found that many Nepalese classroom teachers feel a lack of agency over their curriculum choices and planning. The self-perception of Nepalese teachers as being civil servants within a centralised education system undermines their teacher agency and capacity in making decisions (Baildon & Sim, 2009).

However, whilst acknowledging some scope for individual agency, there is also the need to recognise the wider factors that circumscribe the capacity of Nepalese teachers to bring their own agency to civics and citizenship narratives. As one teacher noted:

> Whenever new subjects or contemporary issues draw policymakers' attention, they first think of including that discipline into social studies which is already overloaded with contents. Recently, environment, population and science and human rights education have been added to the social studies education without considering the capacities and qualifications of teachers to deliver them. (Male Grade 6 teacher)

Teachers are state employees who want to keep their jobs. Understandably, they want their pedagogical practices to be safe and meet with the approval of local communities and school principals. Open, questioning, critical classrooms have not traditionally been a part of Nepalese educational culture. Teacher practice thus reflects the structural balance of power in Nepalese society. Bachrach and Baratz (1962) recognised the powerlessness of those at the bottom-end of decision-making processes nearly sixty years ago:

> Of course, power is exercised when A participates in the making of decisions that affect B. But power is also exercised when A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A. To the extent that A succeeds in doing this, B is prevented, for all practical purposes, from bringing to the fore any issues that might in their resolution be seriously detrimental to A's preferences. (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962 in Haugaard, 2002, pp. 30–31)

This insight closely aligns with the position of Nepalese social studies teachers when it comes to the issues that they can explore with their students. There is a concept passed down from the contexts of influence and the context of text production that the content addressed and the pedagogical modes of interaction with them remain relatively 'innocuous'. Lukes (1974) added the observation that A has power over B if A is able to influence B's thinking in such a way that B wants what A wants. The Nepalese state, civil society and educational intermediaries within the context of text production have been able to construct the parameters within which policy implementation takes place. The effect of this means that largely compliant educators continue to practise mainly docile, bland and transmissive social studies teaching when it comes to the context of practice.

Ideally, of course, teachers should feel that they are key contributors to the policy generation process and that their voices are genuinely listened to. The teachers' role in planning and teaching civics and citizenship education is very important, and thus they need to be trained and qualified. As one teacher put it:

> At present, the curriculum has been designed centrally without giving much importance to the local context. Now that the country has moved toward the federal structure, [curriculum] design at the municipality or village level, which would recognise local issues can be an effective step toward meeting the goals of the social studies education. (Male Grade 7 teacher)

A few interviewed teachers raised concerns about the necessity of adequate training to teach civics and citizenship education. Several of the teachers interviewed for this study noted the paucity of their

own pre-service training for teaching social studies and a lack of in-service professional learning in social studies education during their own time in teaching. As one teacher put it:

> Since social studies is an integrated discipline including several subjects, it necessitates teachers receiving specific training, but I have received only general teacher training. This is to note that English or Maths is just a single subject contrary to social studies. (Male Grade 6 teacher)

Moreover, half of the interviewed teachers discussed the need for more student-friendly teaching methodologies. One noted:

> We should refer to the curriculum, not just textbooks, and need to focus on teaching methodologies to engage students. There is a need for adopting student-centred teaching and learning methodologies for the effective delivery of the social studies curriculum and textbooks (Female Grade 6 teacher).

As a further practical challenge to learning about democracy and equity, several teachers raised concerns about the challenges of teaching students from difficult socio-economic backgrounds who have faced social problems and discrimination in society. As contexts of influence scholars have noted (Braun et al, 2011, p. 595), "Policy-making and policy-makers tend to assume 'best possible' environments for 'implementation': ideal buildings, students and teachers and even resources." One Nepalese teacher stated:

> The use of alcohol and drugs and social problems such as early marriage, human trafficking and caste-based discrimination have been affecting Nepalese society adversely. Most of our students belong to socially and economically marginalised communities and many of them have experienced these issues in their families. (Female Grade 7 teacher)

Similarly, another teacher noted:

> School education alone is not sufficient to meet the goals of social studies education. Family and the home environment of students are equally important for effective learning. Most of our students come from a working-class (economically marginalised) family who cannot give their time to support students. As a result, those children lack creative thinking, respect for others and practical knowledge about family, society and nation. (Male Grade 5 teacher)

Vidovich (2007) observed that the policy cycle model is open to criticism "for overemphasising the agency or (dispersed) power of individuals to recontextualize or transform state education policy at the level of local schools" (p. 289). Another teacher articulated resource and time constraints:

> We have many constraints; we cannot take students out for regular visits to the local community or places of interest due to limited resources allocated for practical learning of social studies and low prioritising of the subject by the school. Furthermore, only 40 minutes each day has been allocated for teaching of social studies which is simply not sufficient. Thus, we focus on teaching and learning of social studies within the school premises. (Female Grade 6 teacher)

Half of the interviewed teachers shared some challenges around engaging students in field visits or community work. Teachers' agency in Nepal might feel understandably constrained given the circumstances in which they are working.

Conclusion

This study generated some distinctive findings. There is quite a strong rhetorical commitment in Nepal to cultural diversity, social justice and equality shared across the three contexts of policy, textbooks and teaching. Overall, however, this paper has identified some gaps and tensions in the context of policy making in Nepal within and between the macro, meso and micro contexts of influence, text production and practice. In Nepal, there is no equivalence of power across the different contexts of influence that have been analysed. The policymakers are in charge and they have historically viewed the education system as a key institution to transmit specific values of the political system and visions of the Nepali state (Caddell, 2007; Pradhan, 2018). Moreover, poor communication across the contexts of policy making, insufficient consultation and discussion between CDC officials, textbook writers and teachers and insufficient recognition of school and classroom-based realities are additional obstacles in the way of successful implementation of education policies in Nepal (Budhathoki, 2018).

In terms of the new knowledge generated by this study, the qualitative research findings have not found the relationships between the various contexts of influence in Nepal to have been quite as dynamic as in some other studies that have applied the policy cycle model. Ball (1998) acknowledged that a limitation of his policy analysis model was "its focus upon Western and Northern developed economies" (p. 119). There is an asymmetry of power. This study has demonstrated that educational policymaking in Nepal has largely been centralised and top-down. In the Nepali public policymaking context, "both politicians (who largely negotiate with elite private sectors) and bureaucrats (who largely deal with international interest groups) serve as policy brokers" (Dhakal, 2019, p. 6). Considerable involvement by foreign actors in the development of citizenship education in Nepal has influenced nearly all policy decisions (see Asian Development Bank, 2015; Smith, 2013). Riddell and Nino-Zarazua (2016, p. 32) argue that by focusing so actively on project aid, "donors are undermining, unwittingly, the education systems that they seek to improve and develop in the first place". As Galegher et al. (2019, p. 127) observed, "Nepalese policymakers are still grappling with making imported policies best suit the needs of the country".

A further finding is that Nepalese textbook policy at the meso level of interpretation follows 'macro' education policy closely and in a spirit of compliance. Policymakers might want to reflect upon what steps they can take to empower Nepalese textbook writers to open up classroom discussion on contested contemporary issues that will interest Nepalese young people and develop opportunities for more critical thinking and consideration of different points of view. There will be benefits in acknowledging the potential of textbook writers to transform values into practice as they translate the multiple goals of social studies education into more open and active pedagogical forms.

Teachers as interpreters of curriculum and textbooks are central to the context of practice. Braun et al. (2011, p. 586) noted that "putting policies into practice is a creative, sophisticated and complex but also constrained process". The qualitative evidence from participating Nepalese teachers in this study indicated that the constraints upon their agency dominated their thinking. Teachers referenced obstacles such as a lack of training, limited resources, a low status for social studies, a culture of transmissive teaching methodologies, uninspiring textbooks and diverse and challenging cohorts of students, all of which could serve as de-limiting the effective enactment of civics and citizenship curriculum teaching and learning. The challenge for Nepalese policymakers is to liberate a stronger sense of teacher creativity.

The findings of this study confirmed the need for recognising the interconnectedness between politics and education across all three contexts of the policy cycle. With the adoption of a new national constitution in 2015 and with a wide range of state powers, including education policy in respect to basic and secondary education, having been devolved to the local levels of government, there are opportunities to create stronger dialogue and exchange across the contexts of influence (Chaudhary, 2019; Daly et al.

2020). People, place, philosophy, processes and considerations of power are all important to factor into processes of educational policy re-visioning and renewal. To be successful, civics and citizenship education (and indeed a range of other education initiatives and imperatives in Nepal) need recognition and support from policymakers and educators throughout Nepalese society—members of parliament, government officials, municipal leaders and other relevant community and village development committees, principals and teachers in different parts of Nepal—all of whom can contribute to creating conditions for more generative dialogue around realising curriculum goals and promoting more effective forms of citizenship education for Nepalese young people.

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