Revisiting democratic pedagogy at secondary schools in Nepal

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Abstract: American educator and philosopher Dewey developed a progressive pedagogical philosophy that emphasizes democratic principles. His approach centers on three main dispositions: equality, intelligent judgment and action, and working together. This study aims to investigate how secondary school teachers in Kailali District implement these dispositions in their teaching processes. This study used a qualitative research design. Ten secondary school teachers from Kailali District, Sudurpaschim Province, were selected through purposive and convenient sampling. A two-day seminar with two sessions was held to explore how these teachers implement the three core dispositions of Dewey's democratic pedagogy. The collected information, insights, and views are analyzed and presented through vignettes based on Dewey's three core dispositions. This study finds that secondary school teachers in Nepal encounter several challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teacher training, insufficient educational resources, and limited familiarity with contemporary teaching methodologies. While the national curriculum framework highlights the importance of democratic pedagogy, it lacks detailed guidelines for its practical application. Furthermore, the study indicates that secondary school teachers in Nepal continues to predominantly employ traditional teaching methods, underscoring the critical need for reform.

Keywords: *Equality, Intelligent judgement, Learning, Teaching, Working together.*

1. Introduction

1.1. Context of the Study

In Nepal school teaches find themselves navigating a complex landscape marked by a tension between governmental policies that emphasize heightened teacher accountability and standardized curricula, and the advocacy of progressive educators who stress the importance of integrating democratic principles into education (Singh, 2012; Shah, 2024). It is essential for teachers to explicitly commit to fostering democratic citizenship, incorporating its implications and potential, and to systematically align their subject matter, pedagogical approaches, and classroom environments to achieve this objective (Dewey, 1902; CDC, 2019). Nevertheless, as illustrated in the forthcoming vignette, a significant challenge for educators lies not merely in the adoption of democratic pedagogy but in comprehending its substantive nature. This article will subsequently provide a detailed examination of what democratic pedagogy can concretely entail within the classroom setting.

Democratic pedagogy is essential in fostering an inclusive and participatory learning environment, aligning closely with the principles outlined in the Education Policy 2019. This policy emphasizes the importance of making education accessible and equitable for all students, regardless of their socio-economic background. Democratic pedagogy supports this objective by promoting active student participation and ensuring that all voices are heard within the classroom (MOST (2019). By involving students in decision-making processes related to their learning, democratic pedagogy not only

empowers them but also aligns with the policy's commitment to creating an educational system that is responsive to the needs of diverse learners.

The Education Policy 2019 highlights the need for educational practices that prepare students for active citizenship and critical thinking. Democratic pedagogy inherently fosters these skills by encouraging students to engage in discussions, debate ideas, and collaboratively solve problems. This approach helps develop students' abilities to think critically and engage in civic activities, which are crucial competencies as outlined in the policy. By integrating democratic principles into teaching practices, educators can cultivate a learning environment that aligns with the policy's vision of preparing students to contribute thoughtfully and effectively to society. Furthermore, the policy advocates for the inclusion of various pedagogical approaches to cater to different learning needs and styles.

Democratic pedagogy, with its focus on dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect, complements this aspect of the policy by accommodating diverse educational needs and promoting a more personalized learning experience. It allows students to take an active role in their learning journey, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the content and a greater connection to their educational experiences. By aligning with the Education Policy 2019, democratic pedagogy not only adheres to national educational goals but also enhances the overall quality and effectiveness of education in Nepal.

The National Curriculum Framework 2019 of Nepal emphasizes the need for a curriculum that fosters critical thinking, creativity, and active engagement among students. Democratic pedagogy is crucial in achieving these goals, as it creates a learning environment where students are encouraged to participate actively in their education (Dewey, 1916). By incorporating democratic principles into teaching, educators can facilitate a classroom atmosphere that values student voice and agency. This approach helps students develop a sense of ownership over their learning, aligns with the curriculum's focus on student-centered education, and supports the cultivation of essential skills such as collaboration and problem-solving.

The National Curriculum Framework 2019 also underscores the importance of inclusivity and respect for diverse perspectives in education. Democratic pedagogy aligns with these values by promoting an equitable learning environment where every student's opinion and contribution are valued. In practice, this means fostering a classroom culture where discussions are open, varied viewpoints are encouraged, and students learn to appreciate and understand different perspectives (DOE, 2010). Such an approach not only supports the framework's emphasis on inclusivity but also helps to build a more cohesive and respectful learning community (MOES, 2008). Moreover, the curriculum framework advocates for the development of students' social and emotional skills alongside academic knowledge CDC (2019). Democratic pedagogy supports this by creating opportunities for students to engage in meaningful dialogue, collaborate with peers, and reflect on their learning experiences (Dewey, 1938). Through these activities, students can enhance their interpersonal skills, build empathy, and develop a greater sense of responsibility and citizenship. By integrating democratic pedagogy, educators can align with the National Curriculum Framework's goals of holistic education, ensuring that students are well-prepared for both academic and personal success.

1.2. Research Question
1.2.1. Vignette
First Session, (November 1, 2023)
Place: Dhangahi, Kailai, Sudurpaschim Province, Nepal

As I entered the seminar hall, ten participants were seated in their respective chairs. Upon my entry, I greeted everyone, and they reciprocated with their own greetings. Subsequently, I clarified the purpose of my meeting with them and expressed my gratitude for their presence. Following this, I provided information about my colleague and requested that they introduce my colleague.

After our introductions, I observed the participants closely. I noticed that they were holding pens and notebooks, attentively looking at me. Following this, I wrote on the seminar hall's board: "Is the curriculum at the Secondary level in Nepal democratic?"

For a few moments, the seminar hall fell silent. I observed that everyone was looking at the board and writing the question in their notebooks. I too waited for a moment, anticipating their responses. However, seeing that none of the participants had initiated a discussion, I decided to ask another question myself: "What are your thoughts on the Secondary level curriculum?"

One participant finally initiated the discussion by stating, "In our school, the curriculum is not available. When I was preparing for the Teacher Service Commission exam, I had studied the curriculum by purchasing it. The curriculum specifies that the learning process should be activity-centered. However, it does not provide details on what constitutes an activity-centered teaching methodology."

One participant finally initiated the discussion by stating, "The curriculum is not available in our schools. When I was preparing for the Teacher Service Commission exam for primary level teachers, I had purchased and studied the Secondary level curriculum. The curriculum specifies that the learning process should be activity-centered. However, it does not provide any details on what constitutes activity-centered teaching procedures."

For a moment, I observed all the participants. They appeared calm, serious, and deeply engrossed in thoughtful consideration. After a brief period of silence, I asked the participants again, "What types of activities do you engage in while teaching in the classroom?"

One participant sitting in the corner responded, 'In my teaching, I employ methods such as question-and-answer sessions, discussions, drama techniques, and role-playing. However, due to the large number of students in my class, conducting activities is quite challenging.

"After a moment of silence, I asked again, 'Who agrees with this perspective?'

Silence prevailed once more, with no participants expressing a willingness to join the discussion.

I then asked, 'Which teaching methods do you use in your instruction?'"

One participant then joined the discussion, saying, "To be honest, most teachers primarily use the lecture method for instruction. Our classrooms have many students; sometimes, we have to teach more than 50 students at a time."

Subsequently, I engaged in discussions with the participants regarding the teaching activities they implement in their classrooms. In my interactions with ten participants, I discovered that they employ various activities such as discussions, question-and-answer sessions, debates, and field visits. Given that the teacher participants instruct different subjects, there were notable differences in their teaching methodologies. Following this, my colleague conducted discussions with the remaining ten participants about their teaching activities. After these discussions, I concluded the day's program.

Second Session, (November 2, 2023)

Place: Dhangahi, Kailai, Sudurpaschim Province, Nepal

As I entered the seminar hall, all the participants were seated. I greeted everyone and asked if they were comfortable, then announced that we would begin the program. Following this, I wrote on the board, "Are your pedagogical practices democratic?"

Today, all participants have actively started engaging in the discussion. In response to my question, one of the participants seated in the front row mentioned that involving everyone in the teaching process is quite challenging. On the other hand, we are required to complete the curriculum within fixed timeframe.

Subsequently, my colleague posed a question to the participants, stating, "Equality is paramount in the context of democratic pedagogy. Hence, how do you conceptualize equality?"

In response, the majority of participants indicated that equality entails providing equal opportunities for all individuals. I subsequently posed an additional query: "Is it feasible for teachers, who manage large student cohorts, to address every student's questions effectively?"

A brief silence descended upon the hall. One participant observed, "Equality denotes providing equal opportunities for all. However, in our context, the implementation of such a principle is fraught with significant difficulties and challenges."

My colleague then posed another question, "How can we enable students to think critically, make intelligent judgments, and act accordingly?" This question proved to be quite challenging for the participants.

The hall remained silent for quite some time.

Breaking the silence, I asked again, "Are you encouraging your students to think critically to find solutions to any problems?"

In response to this inquiry, a substantial number of participants engaged in the discussion. Consequently, the responses provided were diverse. A majority of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the absence of such activities in textbooks and curriculum materials. Additionally, some educators voiced concerns regarding the lack of training in these areas. Only a minority of participants acknowledged employing critical pedagogy in their teaching practices.

In response to this question, a considerable number of participants engaged in the discussion. The majority of participants reported that their students are involved in discussions. However, the participants did not indicate that they encourage their students to engage in peer discussions, critically assess each other's strengths and weaknesses, or participate in collaborative learning activities.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Dewey is a key figure in education known for promoting a social understanding of democracy. He viewed democracy in education as a social process (Dewey, 1938, p. 59), emphasizing that it involves more than just political systems - it encompasses the ways in which people interact and work together within educational settings. Dewey's concept of democratic education relies on three core democratic dispositions. First, he believed that all citizens are moral equals, meaning everyone deserves equal respect and consideration. Second, Dewey stressed that all individuals have the capacity for intelligent judgment and action. This involves not just making decisions but also reflecting on them and determining one's beliefs through thoughtful consideration. Lastly, Dewey highlighted the importance of collaborative problem-solving, asserting that citizens should work together daily to address and resolve conflicts and issues.

Dewey's educational philosophy places a strong emphasis on the principle of moral equality among all citizens. In the educational context, this idea underscores the importance of treating every student with equal respect and consideration, regardless of their social or economic background. Dewey argued that in a democratic educational environment, every student's opinion and contribution should be valued equally. This approach ensures that no student is considered more important or deserving of influence than others. By fostering an environment where all voices are heard and respected, Dewey's principle of moral equality helps create a more inclusive and fair learning environment. This recognition of each student's inherent dignity and worth supports a positive and equitable educational experience for all.

Dewey also emphasized that every individual possesses the capacity for intelligent judgment and action, a concept that has significant implications for education. This capacity goes beyond merely making decisions; it involves engaging in a process of reflection and thoughtful consideration. Dewey believed that students should be encouraged to develop critical thinking skills, allowing them to evaluate their choices and form their own beliefs through reasoned deliberation. By nurturing this ability, educators help students become capable of making informed decisions and taking responsible actions. This aspect of Dewey's philosophy aims to prepare students to participate meaningfully in a democratic society, where thoughtful and autonomous decision-making is crucial.

Furthermore, Dewey highlighted the importance of collaborative problem-solving within democratic education. He argued that effective democracy requires individuals to work together to address and resolve conflicts and issues on a daily basis. In the educational setting, this collaborative approach means fostering a classroom environment where students engage in collective efforts to find solutions. This emphasis on cooperation and mutual support not only helps students develop practical

problem-solving skills but also reinforces the values of teamwork and shared responsibility. Dewey saw this collaborative process as essential to democratic life, believing that it promotes a sense of community and collective engagement, which are integral to the functioning of a democratic society.

Democratic teaching learning operates along a continuum that includes a diverse array of practices designed to cultivate democratic dispositions in students (Davies, 1999; Levin, 1998; Parker, 1996; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). This continuum reflects the idea that democratic education is not a fixed point but rather a range of approaches and strategies that can vary in their application. As educators incorporate more of these democratic practices into their teaching, their pedagogy increasingly aligns with democratic principles. This implies that the extent to which teaching practices support democratic values is directly related to the breadth and depth of these practices.

While there is no comprehensive list detailing all possible democratic practices, research highlights several critical areas that contribute to effective democratic pedagogy. These areas include specific curricular designs that promote equality, instructional methodologies that encourage intelligent judgment and reflective action, and contextual factors that facilitate collaborative problem-solving. Curricula that emphasize themes of equity and justice help students understand and appreciate the principles of fairness and inclusion. Methodologies that foster critical thinking and encourage students to make thoughtful decisions support their development as informed and autonomous individuals. Additionally, creating classroom contexts that promote teamwork and collective effort helps students develop skills in collaboration and conflict resolution.

The focus on these characteristics is essential for developing a democratic educational environment. By addressing these aspects - curriculum, methodology, and context - educators can better support the growth of democratic values in their students. This approach not only involves teaching about democracy but also embedding democratic principles into daily classroom practices to create an environment that genuinely supports democratic engagement and fosters a sense of shared responsibility.

These dispositions, mentioned above, provide a broad framework for understanding democratic pedagogy. In Dewey's view, pedagogy encompasses more than just the curriculum or what is taught; it also includes the methods of teaching and the overall classroom environment. By integrating these principles, educators can create learning environments that reflect democratic values, preparing students for active and responsible participation in society.

1.4. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework underpinning this study is structured around three central tenets: the moral equality of all human beings, the capacity for intelligent and well-informed opinions among individuals, and the efficacy of collaborative problem-solving. This framework not only provides a philosophical basis for the research but also guides the methodological approach and analytical lens through which the study is conducted.

Firstly, the principle of moral equality posits that all human beings possess intrinsic worth and dignity, warranting equal moral consideration. This tenet is grounded in philosophical traditions that emphasize universal human rights and egalitarianism, suggesting that no individual inherently holds a superior or inferior moral status. This principle serves as a foundational ethical stance that informs the study's commitment to inclusivity and equity in examining human interactions and societal structures.

Secondly, the framework acknowledges the inherent capacity of all individuals to form intelligent and well-informed opinions. This assertion is supported by cognitive and educational theories that recognize the potential for intellectual development and critical thinking across diverse populations. By embracing this tenet, the study challenges elitist notions of intellectual hierarchy and promotes a democratic view of knowledge production and dissemination. It underscores the importance of providing equitable access to information and educational resources, enabling all individuals to contribute meaningfully to public discourse and decision-making processes.

Finally, the framework emphasizes the potential of collaborative problem-solving as a means to address complex societal issues. Drawing from organizational behavior and social psychology, this principle highlights the synergistic benefits of collective action, where the pooling of diverse perspectives and expertise can lead to innovative and effective solutions. The emphasis on collaboration is reflective of theories of participatory democracy and cooperative learning, which advocate for the inclusion of multiple stakeholders in problem-solving endeavors to enhance outcomes and foster social cohesion.

In integrating these three principles, the conceptual framework offers a comprehensive and normative perspective that shapes the study's objectives, research questions, and analytical strategies. It advocates for an egalitarian and inclusive approach to understanding human capabilities and societal dynamics, ultimately aiming to contribute to more just and effective problem-solving mechanisms within diverse and complex social contexts. This framework not only provides a robust theoretical foundation but also aligns with contemporary scholarly debates on equity, inclusivity, and collective action in addressing global challenges.
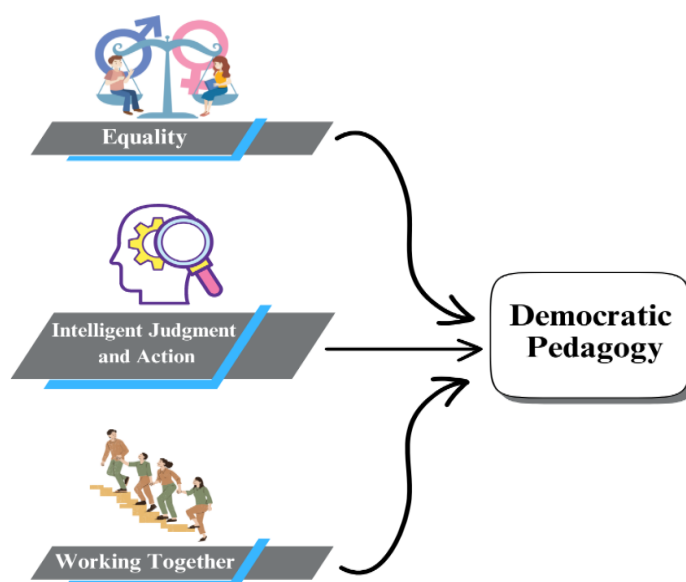

Figure 1.
Framework.

1.5. Research Design

Dewey, an esteemed educator, delineated three essential criteria for democratic teaching: (i) all human beings are morally equal, (ii) we are all capable of intelligent and well-informed opinions, and (iii) we can solve any problem if we work collaboratively. The integration of these fundamental principles into classroom practices is posited to facilitate the democratization of education. Consequently, this study endeavors to ascertain whether secondary education teachers in the Kailali district are implementing these three foundational criteria of democratic pedagogy as outlined by Dewey. Thus, this study adopted a general qualitative research design. In order to full the objective of this study ten secondary school teachers from the Kailali district of Sudurpaschim Province were selected using a purposive and convenient sampling procedure. To collect information and insights, two days' comprehensive seminar was organized through two seminar sessions, which concentrated on examining how these secondary school teaches implement the three core dispositions of Dewey's democratic

pedagogy within their classroom practices. In this study, information, insights and views are analyzed and presented through vignettes structured around the three core themes of Dewey's democratic pedagogy.

2. Discussion

2.1. Defining Democratic Teaching Learning

Definitions of democracy vary, each carrying distinct agendas and expectations. Traditional definitions often focus on a specific political agenda, typically aimed at realizing self-rule (Osborne, 2001, p. 33). In contrast, critical definitions from the 20th century view democracy as a commitment to self- and social empowerment, demanding respect for individual freedom and social justice (Dewey, 1902; Giroux & McLaren, 1986, p. 224). This perspective links democracy to transformative dialogue and action that can alter oppressive conditions (Giroux & McLaren, p. 226). The shift from traditional to critical definitions moves democracy from a narrow political agenda focused on self-rule to a broader, transformative tool for re-imagining society (Hansen, 2002; Levin, 1998; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). In this context, democracy becomes a vital social tool for critiquing current societal structures and considering future alternatives. Given the contemporary view that democratic citizenship education may perpetuate existing political structures and face criticism as potential indoctrination (Sears & Hughes, 2006), defining democracy as a critical tool for societal transformation is increasingly important.

The term "democracy" is increasingly common today as oppressed peoples worldwide fight for human and civil rights. Dictatorships and elected governments are frequently overthrown. Many believe politicians are out of touch with constituents. Conflicts among political, religious, and cultural groups spark debates over free speech, privacy, land use, lifestyles, and individual rights versus societal interests. Amid this turmoil, democracy remains a key standard for evaluating events and ideas. Democracy influences many aspects of social life. In schools, we learn that democracy involves both the participation of citizens in elections and the equal opportunities it offers. Citizens can vote directly and are represented by elected officials in various governmental and local matters, including school policies. However, the deeper conditions necessary for a functioning democracy - the foundations of "the democratic way of life" (Beane, 1990) - are often not explicitly taught. Democratic schools focus on these essential conditions which are: (i) the open flow of ideas, regardless of their popularity, that enables people to be as fully informed as possible; (ii) faith in the individual and collective capacity of people to create possibilities for resolving problems; (iii) the use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems, and policies; (iv) concern for the welfare of others and "the common good"; (v) concern for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities; (vi) an understanding that democracy is not so much an "ideal" to be pursued as an "idealized" set of values that we must live and that must guide our life as a people; (vii) the organization of social institutions to promote and extend the democratic way of life. (Beane, 1990)

Advocates of democratic schools often encounter significant challenges when implementing democratic principles. One major issue is that democratic participation can sometimes lead to contradictory or antidemocratic outcomes. For instance, allowing everyone to have a say in decision-making might lead to calls for censorship, such as restricting certain educational materials. It can also result in controversial practices like using public funds to pay for private school tuition, which may undermine the idea of equal access to education. Additionally, it can perpetuate existing inequalities in the school system. Another challenge is the risk of what is sometimes called the "illusion of democracy." This occurs when authorities appear to offer democratic participation but only to gain support for decisions that have already been made. This manipulation, referred to as "engineering consent" (Graebner, 1988), undermines the genuine democratic process. These tensions and contradictions underscore that making democracy a reality in education is a continuous and often difficult process. Despite these challenges, there is a significant opportunity for educators and community members to collaborate in developing more authentic democratic schools. By addressing these issues, they can work

together to create educational environments that truly serve the common good and promote fairness and equity within the community.

2.2. Equality

Equality is a core principle in Dewey's democratic dispositions (Dewey, 915; Dewey, 1938; McAninch, 1999), asserting that everyone, including students, deserves equal consideration. This means that student voices should be valued equally alongside teachers, curricula, textbooks, and educational authorities. When student voices are truly equal, it enables the development of intelligent judgment, action, and collaborative efforts. To explore how equality manifests in the classroom, I will examine its impact on curriculum content, instructional methods, and resource allocation.

The concept of equality in the classroom extends to the curriculum, meaning students' voices, needs, experiences, and knowledge are on par with the teachers. This equality also implies that students' interests align with those of the teacher and the curriculum. Thus, curricula are not just static documents but are collaboratively created by teachers, students, and educational authorities (Poduska, 1996). To ensure student experiences are represented in the curriculum, teachers must select and design materials that reflect and connect to students' lives (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). This involves understanding students' interests and abilities and integrating relevant histories, including multicultural and gender-related narratives, alongside traditional content (Schultz, 2007; Banks, 2001; Giroux & McLaren, 1986). When students see their own histories and cultures reflected in the curriculum, it fosters empowerment and a sense of belonging (Strong-Boag, 1996; Giroux & McLaren, 1986). For this to happen, the classroom must be a safe, respectful space free from oppression, with equal access to resources (Hansen, 2002; Sorensen, 1996; McAninch, 1999). Therefore, monitoring and modeling supportive interactions are crucial for creating an inclusive learning environment.

To ensure curricular equality, teaching methods must provide equal opportunities for all students to participate. Teachers should use strategies that encourage students to share their experiences, valuing their contributions alongside textbooks and authority figures (Davies, 2006; Fine, Weis, & Powell, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Classroom interactions should highlight the importance of sharing and listening to each other's perspectives (Levin, 1998). Empowerment comes from genuinely valuing and integrating diverse experiences, ideas, and values (Sorensen, 1996). Thus, recognizing and respecting the equal right of student voices is essential. Beyond the emphasis on sharing experiences, classroom decision-making, critical discourse, and assessment practices also affect the degree of equality in a classroom. Involving students in classroom decision-making can take several forms (Levin, 1998). For example, decisions can be made regarding which topics to study for an independent project (Hahn, 1998; Sorensen, 1996), whether to work in groups, pairs, or independently (Poduska, 1996), and when to use the bathroom or a classroom stapler without seeking permission (Cunat, 1996).

Finally, equality in the classroom also relates to an equitable access to resources. Resources are often viewed as textbooks, supplies, and opportunities to participate in field trips (or other school functions). However, the distribution of resources can often increase inequalities in the classroom. The classroom context must be critically reviewed to ensure that all students, including minorities, have equal access to opportunities and resources. This involves adjusting the environment and interactions to ensure that equality is genuinely experienced. Having explored how to achieve equality through inclusive curriculum, personal experience sharing, and student involvement in decisions, I will now examine how to support intelligent judgment and action.

2.3. Critical Thinking and Reflection

Giroux and McLaren (1986) argue that for knowledge to be truly impactful, it must first be made meaningful to students before it can be critically analyzed. This involves connecting the curriculum to students' personal experiences and histories, which helps them relate to and understand the material. However, for knowledge to move beyond mere relevance and become critical, students must engage in reflection and critical thinking. McAninch (1999) highlights Dewey's view that reflection is crucial for

democracy, as it enables individuals to reconstruct values and make informed decisions about their beliefs. This process of reflection, which Dewey refers to as the "method of intelligence," is essential for fostering active and thoughtful participation in a democratic society (Dewey, 1897). To develop the ability to make informed judgments, students need explicit instruction in critical thinking and ample opportunities to practice decision-making (Kassem, 2000; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005).

Curriculum documents (2006), outline the importance of explicit instruction in critical thinking. This involves examining multiple perspectives and making connections between different events, individuals, and locations. Furthermore, students must be guided in developing several key habits of mind, including awareness of their own thought processes, inquisitiveness, fair-mindedness, tolerance, sensitivity, open-mindedness, persistence, and goal-setting (Case & Wright, 1995; Kassem, 2000). These habits support students in engaging deeply with the content and in applying critical thinking skills to various contexts.

One effective instructional method for helping students practice making informed judgments and taking action is through the discussion and debate of controversial issues. Engaging students in debates and discussions on both local and global concerns enables them to explore complex topics from multiple perspectives (Dewey, 1899). Research supports the importance of issue-based curricula in fostering critical thinking and democratic engagement. Hahn (1998) emphasizes that such curricula help students connect their learning to real-world issues, creating a classroom environment where important, often contentious topics can be addressed constructively. Students themselves have expressed a desire for curricula that tackle relevant, controversial issues (Bickmore, 2005; Davies, 2006). This interest highlights the value of creating a learning space where students can openly discuss and critically evaluate significant topics. Hahn's (1998) research, based on surveys of 14 to 19-year-olds across five countries, found a positive relationship between students' perceptions of classroom openness and their belief in their ability to influence governmental decisions, a concept known as political efficacy. Similarly, Sears (2004) observed that classrooms where social issues are actively discussed and investigated tend to see higher levels of student knowledge and engagement. This correlation underscores the role of open, issue-based dialogue in enhancing students' understanding and involvement in civic matters.

Controversial issues that merit deliberation in the classroom cover a wide range of topics, including environmental concerns and the inherent inequities found within social, racial, gender, and class divisions. Addressing these issues requires a classroom environment that fosters respect and open dialogue, allowing students to explore diverse perspectives on complex topics. Within this supportive setting, students should have opportunities to engage in debates, collaboratively discuss different viewpoints, and develop their own informed opinions. Furthermore, students should be encouraged to consider taking action based on the conclusions they reach, thereby integrating their learning into practical, real-world contexts (Levin, 1998; Osler & Starkey, 2000). For teachers, facilitating this process involves more than just guiding discussions; it also requires helping students analyze their own experiences. Teachers must assist students in understanding how their personal experiences and perspectives have been shaped and validated, or challenged, by various social and cultural influences (Giroux & McLaren, 1986). This reflective practice is crucial for fostering critical thinking and enabling students to scrutinize their assumptions and expectations. As illustrated by the earlier vignette, making informed decisions necessitates a thorough examination of the underlying processes that shape students' beliefs and viewpoints. This critical investigation helps students make sense of their learning and prepares them to engage thoughtfully with the broader societal issues they encounter.

Although not extensively covered in research on democratic pedagogy, Davies (2005) emphasizes the crucial role of imagination in human rights education. According to Davies, fostering imagination in students is essential for preparing them to envision a future aligned with their values and aspirations. This imaginative practice helps students develop the ability to think creatively about potential solutions to problems and take ownership of their roles in creating change. Imagination, in this context, is not

merely a supplementary skill but a fundamental component of effective problem-solving and decision-making.

Davies highlights that problem-solving extends beyond critical thinking to include a creative dimension. When students are engaged in addressing controversial issues, they need to move beyond analyzing problems to envisioning innovative solutions. This process of imaginative thinking allows students to conceptualize how the world could be improved and motivates them to work toward that vision. By encouraging students to imagine the future as they would like it to be, teachers can help them develop the skills necessary to address complex issues and take meaningful action.

To effectively integrate this imaginative element into teaching controversial issues, Davies advocates for collaborative opportunities where students can work together to envision and articulate their ideal outcomes. This collaborative approach not only enhances students' problem-solving skills but also fosters a sense of collective ownership over the solutions they propose. Imagination thus serves as the creative link that facilitates informed decision-making. By incorporating imaginative practices into their pedagogy, teachers can support students in developing the critical and creative skills necessary for navigating and addressing the complex issues they will encounter in their lives.

2.4. Teamwork

In democratic pedagogy, cooperation and teamwork are essential elements that underpin various aspects of classroom practice. This is evident in the emphasis on students listening to and sharing their voices, providing peer assessment and feedback, and engaging in collaborative dialogues on controversial issues (CERID, 2002). As McAninch (1999) articulates, democracy involves the belief that, despite differing needs and goals among individuals, the practice of amicable cooperation itself enriches life. This cooperative spirit is integral to fostering a democratic environment where students are encouraged to work together, respect diverse perspectives, and contribute to a shared learning experience.

Practically, this collaborative approach should extend beyond the classroom. It must integrate interactions between the classroom and the broader community, creating a dynamic exchange that benefits both spheres. This concept of collaboration is described by Osler and Starkey (2005) as an "outward looking" approach. In this context, community encompasses both local and global dimensions, involving a wide range of individuals and groups. For instance, multimedia tools can connect students with peers in other countries, facilitating cross-cultural exchanges and global perspectives. Additionally, local community members can be invited into the classroom to share their expertise and experiences, enriching the curriculum with real-world insights. Global organizations can also be engaged through partnerships and support, providing students with opportunities to contribute to larger social causes.

Moreover, practical experiences such as field trips can be organized to explore various aspects of the local community, allowing students to apply their learning in diverse settings. These activities not only enhance students' understanding of their immediate environment but also connect them with broader societal contexts (CDC, 2005). By bringing the community into the classroom and extending classroom activities into the community, teachers can create a more integrated and meaningful educational experience that reflects the democratic values of cooperation and engagement.

In the context of democratic pedagogy, the role of schools extends beyond the confines of the classroom to encompass their function within and as a creator of society. Giroux and McLaren (1986) highlight the significance of classroom-community collaboration, noting that such engagement not only enhances students' cooperative skills but also fosters a broader sense of equality that reaches beyond the educational setting. By integrating schools into the wider community, educators create valuable opportunities for students to connect their learning with real-world contexts, thus reinforcing the practical relevance of their education.

When schools fail to engage with the community, students can become isolated within educational institutions that limit their understanding of how their knowledge can be applied in broader societal contexts. This isolation often results in students feeling disenfranchised, as they are deprived of both a

voice and a meaningful connection between their academic experiences and their potential impact on the public sphere. By actively involving the community in the educational process, schools can mitigate this issue, allowing students to see how their learning can contribute to and transform their communities. This approach not only supports the development of democratic dispositions but also ensures that students understand the power and importance of their education in influencing societal change.

An outward-looking classroom is characterized by its integration of the community into the educational experience, offering students a broad and diverse perspective on their environment. This approach starts with a curriculum designed to expose students to various facets of their local and global communities. By incorporating topics and materials that reflect different aspects of the community - ranging from local history and current events to global issues and cultural studies - the curriculum helps students understand and appreciate the interconnectedness of their world. This exposure not only broadens their knowledge base but also fosters a sense of belonging and responsibility towards their community.

In practice, an outward-looking classroom employs teaching methods that emphasize critical interactions with a wide range of community individuals and groups. This involves inviting guest speakers from different sectors, organizing field trips to local organizations, and engaging in community-based projects. These interactions provide students with firsthand experiences and perspectives, allowing them to critically analyze and understand the complexities of their community. For example, students might collaborate with local non-profits, participate in civic activities, or engage in service-learning projects. These activities help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application, making learning more relevant and impactful.

Moreover, an outward-looking classroom creates a context that empowers students within their communities, both locally and globally. By connecting classroom learning with community issues and initiatives, students gain the skills and confidence needed to make meaningful contributions to their surroundings. This empowerment can manifest in various ways, such as students initiating community projects, advocating for social justice, or participating in global movements. The goal is to cultivate informed, active citizens who not only understand their role in their immediate community but also recognize their impact on a broader, global scale. Through these experiences, students develop a sense of agency and responsibility, reinforcing the democratic values of participation and service.

3. Conclusion

The three principal tenets of Dewey's democratic pedagogy are equality, intelligent judgment and action, and participatory collaboration. This study investigated the extent to which secondary-level teachers in Nepal are implementing these principles in their classrooms, and, if so, how they are doing so. Implementing democratic teaching methods in traditional schools requires more than just open dialogue. These classrooms must cultivate students' critical thinking abilities, and it is essential for teachers to critically evaluate their students as well (Bajarcharya, 1995).

Implementing equality, intelligent judgement and action, and working together in the classroom presents significant challenges. The application of Dewey's principles within a prescribed and centralized curriculum, compounded by overcrowded classrooms, is inherently difficult. The necessity to complete the curriculum within a set timeframe, administer examinations, and the burden on a single teacher to cover multiple subjects further exacerbates the difficulty of achieving effective teaching. In a developing country like Nepal, societies are traditional and orthodox, there is a notable deficiency in physical infrastructure, the curriculum remains traditional, teachers are generally unfamiliar with democratic teaching methodologies, and there is a scarcity of teaching materials (Acharya, 2002). Under such conditions, achieving effective teaching learning becomes exceedingly arduous. In this context, it is especially relevant to reference Beane's (2005, p. 5) findings: Standing for democracy is more powerful than standing for a teaching method. And criticizing democracy is much more difficult than attaching a teaching method.

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