

**Action Initiatives in Integrating Indigenous<sup>1</sup> and non-Western Knowledge<sup>2</sup> in Curricular Practices of Tribhuvan University, Faculty of Education: A Qualitative Inquiry**

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**Abstract**

Higher education in Nepal has been guided by the Western academic culture, thereby promoting Western knowledge and ways of knowing as superior. Adoption of external ideas and practices has subjugated indigenous and non-Western knowledge heritages in Nepal. Based on textual data collected from teacher educators in virtual Webinars and review of existing core courses of Master of Education (M.Ed.), this article first shows that university actors are starting the process of decolonization of curricular practices. Teacher educators including curriculum developers are using negotiation, resistance, and response to the supremacy of imported education. In so doing, they have incorporated a small portion of indigenous and non-Western knowledge in some of the courses and contextualized some of their pedagogical and assessment practices. However, as this article goes on to show, Western modern educational practices remain dominant. We conclude that the teacher educators have increasing awareness of

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<sup>1</sup> Informally generated knowledge of indigenous peoples that are experiences, beliefs, worldviews, oral traditions, myths, cosmologies and so on and so forth

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the non-Western knowledge is the body of knowledge in religious philosophies such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islamism

external domination on curricular practices and they have initiated the actions of reclaiming their indigenous and non-Western knowledge through curricular practices from within the structural barriers of Western model of academia. The university structure needs to promote a conducive educational environment in order to provide justice to indigenous and non-Western knowledge and ways of knowing thereby reforming curricular practices.

नेपालमा उच्च शिक्षाको अभ्यास र परम्परा पश्चिमा शैक्षिक संस्कृतिद्वारा निर्देशित हुँदै आएको छ । पश्चिमा प्राज्ञिक ढाँचाले नेपालको उच्च शिक्षामा आफ्नो श्रेष्ठता कायम गरि पश्चिमा ज्ञान र सिप अनि ज्ञान प्राप्त गर्ने तौर तरिकालाई प्रवर्द्धन गरेको छ । यस्तो बाह्य विचार र अभ्यासको अंगीकार गर्नाले नेपालमा रहेको आफ्नै आदिवासी र गैर-पश्चिमा ज्ञान सम्पदालाई दमन गरेको छ । यस आलेखले अनलाइन गोष्ठीहरू मार्फत विश्वविद्यालयका प्राध्यापकहरूबाट संकलित सूचना र त्रिभुवन विश्वविद्यालय शिक्षा शास्त्र संकायको स्नाकोत्तर तहको शिक्षाको आधार अन्तर्गतका मुख्य पाठ्यक्रमहरूको समीक्षाको आधारमा विश्वविद्यालयको शैक्षिक अभ्यासहरूमा अउपनिवेशीकरणको प्रक्रिया केहि हद सम्म प्रारम्भ भएको तथ्य प्रस्तुत गरेको छ । पाठ्यक्रम विकासकर्ताहरू सहित प्राध्यापकहरूले आयातित शिक्षाको सर्वोच्चतालाई महशुस गरि त्यसको विरुद्धमा आफ्नो क्षमताको तहवाट प्रतिरोध र प्रतिक्रिया देखाउन थालेका छन् । यसो गर्दा उनीहरूले शिक्षाका आधारसँग सम्बद्ध केही पाठ्यक्रमहरूमा सानो अंश भएपनि आदिवासी र गैर-पश्चिमा ज्ञानको समावेशीकरण गरेका छन् । त्यसैगरि प्राध्यापकहरूले आफ्ना शिक्षण पद्धति र मूल्याङ्कन प्रकृया र अभ्यासहरूलाई सान्दर्भिक बनाउँदै लगेका छन् । यद्यपि यस लेखले पश्चिमा आधुनिक शैक्षिक अभ्यासहरू अझै हावी रहेको तथ्यलाई नकार्न सकेको भने छैन । नेपालको उच्च शिक्षाको अभ्यासमा पाश्चात्य प्रभुत्व बारे प्राध्यापकहरूमा चेतना बढेको र उनीहरूले पश्चिमी ढाँचा अन्तर्गतको संरचनागत अवरोधहरूको वावजुद पाठ्यक्रम वा आफ्ना शैक्षिक अभ्यासहरू मार्फत आदिवासी र गैर-पश्चिमी ज्ञानको पुन प्राप्त गर्ने कार्यहरूको सुरुवात गरिरहेका छन् भन्ने यस लेखको निष्कर्ष रहेको छ । तसर्थ विश्वविद्यालयको संरचनाले अर्थपूर्ण शिक्षालाई प्रवर्द्धन गर्नको लागि आदिवासी र गैर-पश्चिमा शैक्षिक अभ्यासलाई न्याय प्रदान गर्न पाठ्यक्रम र शैक्षिक अभ्यासहरूमा व्यापक सुधार गर्दै अनुकूल शैक्षिक वातावरणको प्रवर्द्धन गर्न आवश्यक छ ।

**Keywords:** Western modern knowledge, indigenous, non-Western, decolonization, pedagogies, assessment, curriculum

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## Introduction

Nepal is a highly diverse country in terms of caste/ethnicity, language, culture, and religion. Specifically, there are 59 indigenous groups (*Adivasi Janajati*) officially recognized by the state (Government of Nepal [GoN], 2002) among 126 castes/ethnic groups speaking more than 123 languages (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2012). Based on religious belief, they are divided into Hindu, Buddha, Kirat, Bon, and Muslim. It is evident that they have their

own culture, indigenous/local knowledge systems, beliefs, worldviews, and epistemic traditions. However, Nepali higher education has less association with the contexts of youths from diverse Nepali communities due to the adoption of policies guided by neoliberal ideas (Regmi, 2021). The education, from the very beginning, when Tri Chandra College was established in 1919 under the affiliation and prescribed courses of Patna University, India (Upadhyay, 2018), was already influenced by British colonization. It has followed the international academic practices expanding structured and rigid programs in the country (Stiller & Yadav, 1979) sidelining the indigenous and non-Western knowledge and ways of knowing.

Higher education in Nepal from the very beginning played an important role in introducing the Western modern education system particularly of Indian traditions that were already guided by British colonialism then after American traditions (Bista, Sharma, & Raby, 2019). Tribhuvan University, the largest university in Nepal, established in 1959 has introduced different graduate programs with technical and non-technical courses which have dominantly included Western knowledge based on Western modern worldviews. The Western modern worldviews that grew in the enlightenment era with the belief of ontology of materialism that regards mind-independent matter as the only reality in the world and objectivity as epistemology (Luitel & Taylor, 2019) are blind towards indigenous and non-Western knowledge and knowing. Thus, the higher education in Nepal that has promoted Western knowledge came to Nepal from the West as a part of modern development with international support (Rist, 2014). The practices of this modern education have ignored the metaphysical beliefs of supernatural beings (spirituality), empathy, emotions, values, aesthetics, and ethics which represent indigenous and non-Western knowledge.

The centrally designed curriculums have legitimized Western knowledge. The corpus of indigenous knowledge, generated through the primitive contact with the life-worlds of indigenous peoples and native ideas, beliefs, values, and norms passed down from generation to generation (Akullo et al., 2007), is largely neglected in the curricular practices of university education. Imitative Western academic culture has devalued the body of lived/experience knowledge embedded in the local culture and environment, community practices, institutions, and rituals. Indigenous knowledge

as a body of relational knowledge (Hart, 2010) produced in the process of continuous interaction or engagement with the natural resources and tested over centuries of use have been underrepresented in the curriculum of higher education in Nepal. The indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing are embedded in Shamanic practices (Dhungana & Yamphu, 2016), and knowing through lessons, sayings, proverbs, riddles, metaphors, experiences, and '*Arti-upadesh*' (Chemjong, 2003) are unloved in the curricular practices of modern higher education.

The subjugation of indigenous and non-Western knowledge systems began from such an un/conscious importation of Western ideas. The legacy has still continued with less realized resistance from any of the higher education policies, practices, and structures. It does not mean to say that the Western modern knowledge and ways of knowing are worthless or wrong to adapt in Nepali higher education. But, the concern is that higher education has promoted unjust educational practices. The emphasis given to perpetuating the Western domination has promoted the irrelevant or less usable knowledge and skills in day to day lives of students. The decontextualized curricular practices (Luitel, 2009) are instrumental to detach students from their native cultural worlds. The learning in the boundary of classrooms, teacher-centric and text-book guided pedagogies, disconnection of community or indigenous knowledge have compelled them to engage in rote-memorization of abstract Western ideas and concepts.

With the realization of injustice created by the Western ideas and subjugation of indigenous knowledge (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999) particularly in higher education of Nepal, NORHED QUANTICT Project (2013 – 2020), with three partners namely; Tribhuvan University, Faculty of Education, Kathmandu University School of Education, & Oslo Met University Norway, kept on continuous effort for a decade on promoting equity and inclusion of indigenous knowledge in higher education through drawing the attention of key actors of the university. In this context, this paper, based on qualitative inquiry, collecting the experiences of teacher educators of different constituent and affiliated campuses of Tribhuvan University in two different Webinars, explores the action initiatives taken in integrating indigenous and non-Western knowledge particularly in the core courses/courses of Foundations of Education.

In dealing with the issue of decolonizing curricular practices, the paper highlights the efforts taken in incorporating indigenous and non-Western knowledge as the content of curricula through a review of the courses of Foundations of Education. The paper further delves into how the teacher educators have initiated to decolonize educational practices in a university setting. In addition, it deals with the analysis and discussion of experiences of teacher educators in assimilating indigenous and non-Western knowledge in pedagogical and assessment practices.

Based on the analysis and discussion of the qualitative data collected from the Webinar participants, the paper draws key insights as concluding remarks. The paper concludes that the teacher educators have initiated to resist the invisible power domination of Western ideas and practices of education. They have a sense of ‘mourning, dreaming and commitment’ (Chilisa, 2012) in changing the unjust educational practices in higher education. They have started to visualize the association of indigenous and non-Western knowledge with Western modern knowledge. This is the process of recovering their culture in the process of engaging in teaching-learning processes. The action initiatives through negotiation, resistance, and response to external suppression even in a structural uncondusive educational environment perpetuated by the Western model of the academy are in line with decolonizing higher education in Nepal.

## **Methodology**

For understanding the phenomena, we mainly used a qualitative approach to research. We believed that qualitative research as a Western approach could provide space for understanding non-Western cultural traditions (González y González & Lincoln, 2006). The approach facilitated us to explore the subjective worlds of teacher educators. The decolonial or indigenous methodology could be appropriate to engage in the contexts in a culture-sensitive and respectful manner thereby, getting informed consent for invited observation and careful listening of the stories (Smith, 1999; Chilisa, 2012; Hart, 2010; Held, 2019)) of teacher educators. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic situation could not allow us to participate meaningfully in the working contexts of the teacher educators.

Because of this disapproving situation, we tried to understand the views on action initiatives adopted to integrate indigenous and

non-Western knowledge in the educational practices of the university through two virtual Webinars conducted by the NORHED QUANTICT Project. The first Webinar was conducted on the 17th and the 18th July 2020 including sixty teacher educators from Provinces 1 and 2 and the second Webinar was conducted on the 31st July and the 1st August 2020 including eighty teacher educators from Provinces 5, 6, and 7. The Webinars also included eleven Subject Committee (SC) members responsible for developing curriculums and other five administrative professionals of the university. The participants shared their experiences, ideas, perspectives, and practices regarding the integration of indigenous and non-Western knowledge in their curricular practices at the Master of Education (M. Ed) level. We maintained the notes and recordings of the discussion in the Webinars and transcribed in detail the ideas shared in the Webinars. Moreover, we followed a sequential process of searching, recognizing, coding, categorizing, and generating themes of the ideas (Ngulube, 2015). We, then, describe and present the data in order to interpret them and provide their underlying meanings. Further, we used reflections and synthesis drawn by different experts in the Webinars as data to support our arguments.

In addition, we reviewed the semester courses of Foundations of Education-core compulsory courses of Master of Education (M.Ed.) in order to explore the action initiatives in order to integrate the indigenous knowledge in the curriculums. In so doing, we reviewed each of seven older and newly developed courses in order to understand the changes made from the indigenous and non-Western perspectives. The courses were a) Ed. 511: Foundations of Education; b) Ed. 513: Advanced Educational Psychology; c) Ed. 521: Curriculum Practices; d) Ed. 522: Education and Development; e) Ed. 531: Measurement and Evaluation in Education; f) Ed. 532: Research Methodology in Education; and g) Ed. 541: Contemporary Educational Issues. We reviewed the courses particularly focusing on the scope of contents. In so doing, we simply identified and segregated the Western modern and indigenous or non-Western contents to look at the preference given to the courses.

## **Findings and Discussion**

This section deals with the key findings of action initiatives taken by curriculum makers (Subject Committee members and other experts of Foundations of Education, a department of core courses of

Master of Education) in apportioning indigenous and non-Western knowledge as the content of the course. In the second sub-section, we articulate the subjective views of teacher educators that represent their mourning, dreaming, and commitment and discussed from the decolonial perspective. The third section analyzes and discusses the key findings of action initiatives taken by teacher educators in integrating indigenous and non-Western knowledge in pedagogical and assessment practices.

### ***Integration of indigenous and non-western knowledge in course content***

As we reviewed the courses, we found that there is a domination of Western modern ideas and concepts in most of the core courses of master level programs in Tribhuvan University, Faculty of Education. However, there are a few courses that integrate a small portion of indigenous knowledge and non-Western ideas. For example, ‘Ed. 511: Foundations of Education’ and ‘Ed. 522: Education and Development’ include the indigenous and non-Western knowledge in a unit. However, there are other courses such as ‘Ed. 513: Advanced Educational Psychology’, ‘Ed. 531: Measurement and Evaluation in Education’, ‘Ed. 532: Research Methodology in Education’, and ‘Ed. 521: Curriculum Practices’ in which there is no explicitly incorporated indigenous knowledge or non-Western ideas. The course ‘Ed. 541: Contemporary Educational Issues’ also provides less space for engaging students in writing a seminar paper on indigenous and non-Western ideas. For example, the course specifies particular non-indigenous issues on which students prepare seminar papers. However, the issues in the course such as ‘Language’, ‘Access, Equity and Inclusion’, and ‘Community Participation’ are likely to provide space for analyzing and discussing the indigenous issues.

In comparison to the older courses, the new courses which are recently revised are more progressive in terms of integrating indigenous and non-Western knowledge. Particularly, the ‘Ed. 511: Foundations of Education’ appears with more explicit in terms of including Nepal’s indigenous philosophies such as *Kirat Mundhum*<sup>3</sup>. It has included indigenous cosmos, corpus, and praxis with nature (Toledo, 1999), other arts and vernacular knowledge, and knowledge embedded in agricultural practices. The course has incorporated non-Western knowledge such as the ideas of Bhagwat Gita, Basic ideas of

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<sup>3</sup> Religious scriptures and folk literature *Kirat* indigenous groups such as *Rai*, *Limbu*, *Yakkha*, and *Sunuwar* of the East of Nepal.

Buddhism, and Islamism/Quran. Second, the course ‘Ed. 513: Advanced Educational Psychology’ seems more sensitive to indigenous issues as it incorporates explicitly the indigenous perspectives for looking at the issues of adolescence. The counseling and guidance in schools is a newly added chapter that includes indigenous and non-Western knowledge. These issues were less focused in the old course of ‘Ed. 513: Advanced Educational Psychology’. The third course, ‘Ed. 521: Curriculum Practices’ also includes the indigenous perspectives as a unit which envisages analyzing the curriculums from decolonial perspectives. However, the older course was almost silent on these issues.

In addition, the new course ‘Ed. 522: Education and Development’ seems more sensitive to incorporating indigenous and non-Western knowledge. The course tries to deal with the role of indigenous knowledge in sustainable development. Further, it has included more explicitly the concept of peace from Vedic and Buddhist perspectives. It has raised the issues of equity, participation, inclusion, and other human rights issues of the people at the margin including indigenous peoples for social sustainability. In addition, the idea of a ‘right-based approach to development’ provides space for dealing with indigenous issues. However, the courses, ‘Ed. 531: Measurement and Evaluation in Education’ and ‘Ed. 532: Research Methodology on Education’ has included much less indigenous and non-Western ideas and practices of research. There is no explicit articulation of the issues. But, the course, ‘Ed. 541: Contemporary Educational Issues’ focuses on the issues of indigenous/minority languages to use as a medium of instruction and caste/ethnicity. Moreover, the course deals with the issues of access, equity, and inclusion of marginalized and deprived segments of society in educational processes.

From the above discussion, we understood that there is still more domination of Western ideas and concepts in most of the core courses of the Faculty of Education at the Master of Education level. However, the attempt has been made to integrate more indigenous and non-Western knowledge in the newly revised courses as compared to older courses. This indicates that the key actors of course development, including the Subject Committee of Foundations of Education, are more sensitive towards promoting inclusion and equity as human rights of diverse groups whose knowledge systems are under continuous marginalization in higher education. We understood



that the practices of developing courses were action initiatives on deconstructing the culturally deficient models and reconstructing the past stories of indigenous or local peoples (Chilisa, 2012). This was a critical appraisal and action against the imperial model of the academy that continued the colonization of education and marginalized indigenous and local people to create the space to communicate from their own frames of reference (Smith, 1999). However, the curriculums were still under the domination of Western ideas and practices.

This might be due to the fact that the university curriculum in Nepal is designed centrally with the ideas of few experts giving less attention to contextual realities. The curriculum is developed by loading Western theoretical content assuming that the qualified students are produced through inputs and processes as the products of an industry with intended abilities (Le Grange, 2016). The compulsion of taking into consideration the market demands particularly in schools and bureaucratic spheres might force curriculum makers to select the Western ideas with rigid processes of education. Further, the existing educational structure guides them to adopt them to develop rigid and structured curriculums. These curricula are less friendly to address the community's needs and expectations. The present-day university curricula that are characterized with fixity and closeness have limited the students to discuss the alternative thoughts of non-Western and indigenous knowledge. It has denied the learning through indigenous traditions adopting lived experiential knowing of the real-world situations. This has marginalized the multiple individual experiences of students that they have gained in families and communities. The curricula have limited the ways of knowing through student-friendly pedagogies. However, the university actors have realized and demonstrated actions against such structural domination on curricular practices.

### **Mourning, Dreaming, and Commitment**

The Webinars conducted in the collaboration of Tribhuvan University, Faculty of Education, Kathmandu University School of Education, and Oslo Met University Norway, under NORHED QUANTICT Project, provided space for more than one hundred teacher educators to share their experiences, ideas, and perspectives on integrating indigenous knowledge in their own curricular practices. There were more than two dozen teacher educators who were

particularly teaching the core courses (courses of Foundations of Education). We have highlighted here the representative voices of the participants. One of the teacher educators from eastern Nepal noted, “The present curriculums are less friendly to indigenous knowledge. It should be revised immediately with integrating indigenous knowledge and also it should be made online friendly.” Another teacher educator from Sukuna Multiple Campus, Morang, said, “We have our own huge body of knowledge but our curriculum is guided by top-down approach and mostly dominated by the West. We have been neglecting eastern knowledge in the process of making curriculum”. Similarly, a teacher educator from Pathari Multiple Campus shared, “We should integrate the concept of indigenous knowledge in classroom practices and curriculum but these are included less”. The ideas of teacher educators demonstrate their ‘mourning and dreaming’ (Le Grange, 2016, p. 5). They have felt the injustice promoted by the university structure. They have a kind of realization of the domination of external knowledge and ways of knowing neglecting their own indigenous and non-Western knowledge systems.

Many teacher educators demonstrated their commitment to promoting indigenous and non-Western knowledge through university curricular practices. One of the key experts synthesized the commitment generated in the Webinars as follows: a) Teacher educators have given some efforts to integrate indigenous and non-Western knowledge via pedagogical practices, assessments, and research activities in those courses where there are a few contents included otherwise these bodies of knowledge have been deserted; b) Indigenous and non-Western knowledge are apportioned much less in particular courses only and hence there is the domination of Western ideas and practices in most of the courses; c) We need to be sensitive towards indigenous issues in classroom practices; d) We need intercultural and interdisciplinary contents focusing on indigenous and non-indigenous knowledge; e) We have to rethink about the top-down model of curriculum making with foreign contents domination; and f) We need to promote equity, justice, and inclusion of indigenous and non-Western knowledge which have been suppressed by the international discourses. These were the collective promises to struggle against the domination of the Western academy in order to promote the right to self-determination and social justice and about

seeking legitimacy for knowledge that is embedded in their histories, experiences, and ways of viewing reality (Smith, 1999).

Another key expert synthesized the commitment that they needed to think about the transformation of rigidity and structured curriculum and its development process to more flexible, collaborative, and participatory approaches. He was in favor of embracing the diversity of knowledge and assessing the beliefs and awareness of integrating indigenous and non-Western knowledge in the curricular practices. The key experts in the Webinars drew key synthesized ideas of the participant teacher educators as takeaways and their collective commitments of integrating indigenous and non-Western knowledge and ways of knowing. It was a shift from mourning to dreaming and commitment to the decolonization of higher education practices (Le Grange, 2016). The teacher educators were committed to think and act with their own historically rooted beliefs, worldviews and knowledge systems (Le Grange, 2016). They realized that they were under the domination of imported ideas and practices of education. They were able to imagine the alternative possibilities of curricular practices rooted in contextual realities. In addition, the teacher educators were committed to including the knowledge systems of colonized others in the higher education curriculum. They demonstrated the commitment to translate their dreams into actions through different strategies. Even though the teacher educators were integrating indigenous knowledge in their curricular practices to the extent possible amidst structural barriers. However, these practices might not be informed pedagogical practices.

### **Integrating Indigenous Knowledge with Pedagogy and Assessment**

College teachers from throughout Nepal who participated in the Webinars organized by NORHED QUANTICT, Central Department of Education, shared their views and experiences of their pedagogical practices of the integration of indigenous and non-Western knowledge. Most of the teachers in the Webinar noted that they sometimes shared their personal stories linking with global contexts. Many teachers sometimes shared examples from local community practices for contextualizing classroom learning. In many cases, the teacher educators shared local ideas, beliefs, and community practices as examples to connect with the ideas in the courses. In this sense, they, knowingly and unknowingly, discussed the indigenous and non-

Western knowledge in the classroom teaching-learning activities in the process of delivering their ideas on course contents. One of the teachers in the Webinar said:

There is less indigenous and non-Western knowledge as such in the course contents but it can be integrated through pedagogical practices. We share examples from the community practices and also allow students to share their prior ideas and beliefs in the class. Sometimes, we share the Western theoretical ideas and then give examples of our own practices. In the classroom, we allow them to discuss the theoretical ideas in the group and they gradually share their personal, local, and communal practices in the class.

The pedagogies as methods and practices of teaching-learning activities were largely conventional in Tribhuvan University, Faculty of Education. There was the domination of the practices of delivering content knowledge through lectures. The teacher-centric pedagogical practices were less supportive to promote indigenous and non-Western knowledge. However, the teachers and students as custodians of indigenous knowledge were able to share, discuss, and express their prior ideas and beliefs. In many cases, they were adopting constructivist and progressivist approaches which were more flexible to integrate indigenous knowledge, beliefs, and worldviews in the class (Rai & Shyangtan, 2021). The approaches might be more meaningful in order to conceptualize the newer Western ideas. The indigenous and non-Western knowledge might be a tool to make Western modern knowledge more accessible, moving from known to unknown (Mawere, 2015). These practices might be serving as prerequisites for conceptualizing abstract Western modern ideas or concepts. The students could be able to improve the conceptual development by linking their non-Western and indigenous knowledge with Western theoretical concepts through reflective processes (Snively & Corsiglia, 2001).

The practices of shared learning were not purposeful to integrate indigenous knowledge though these practices were a radical departure from the rigid and structured teacher-centric practices. These practices were providing justice to some extent to the students to uncover their indigenous knowledge. However, the teacher educators had hardly thought of using such pedagogical practices in order to integrate

indigenous knowledge. One of the teacher educators of a campus of east Nepal noted:

Integrating indigenous knowledge in higher education depends on curricular content. For example, I completely discuss indigenous knowledge on the topic 'indigenous ways of child development as the topic of discussion provides space to explore indigenous knowledge.

Even though many teacher educators were less aware of how to link the topic with practical knowledge. The teacher educators who participated in the Webinars were positive about the integration of indigenous knowledge in teaching learning in higher education. Many of them shared that they have been integrating them in different ways in their teaching.

The teacher educators were in favor of rethinking the pedagogical and assessment practices in higher education particularly in the courses of Foundations of Education. They were remarking on the unjustifiable centrally designed curriculum-making process (as the process excluded the involvement of teachers, students, and communities) that has given less emphasis on indigenous and non-Western learning materials and structured assessment practices. One participant in one of the Webinars remarked:

The courses of Foundations of Education are more theoretical. These are not practical. There are few topics that are related to indigenous and non-Western knowledge but these are not enough. Reading materials on indigenous knowledge is to be prescribed in the course i.e. contents that should reflect indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge should be incorporated as separate subjects or topics in the courses. The students are to be engaged in the communities to collect, analyze and discuss the indigenous knowledge and practices. There are still tendencies of rigid and time-bound examinations that compel students to rote memorize the contents just to pass the tests at the end of the semester.

We understand that the teacher educators of campuses of Tribhuvan University Faculty of Education in Nepal have realized that they have been adopting the disempowering nature of transmissionists' approaches to teaching-learning activities. They were not in favor of

transmitting the textbook content to the students through lectures. They were aware of the practices that the ‘one size fits for all’ approach has passivated the students, compelling them to memorize imported ideas and concepts. They thought that the existing pedagogical approaches have facilitated the promotion of decontextualized teaching-learning activities (Luitel, 2009). The teacher educators have a consciousness that the students are exposed less in their indigenous contexts with locally developed materials and cultural artifacts.

The teacher educators have questioned the practices of rare engagement of the students in shared learning and critical self-reflective learning through project works in their own communities. They have demonstrated their sensitiveness of detaching students from everyday contexts with less focus on promoting their prior indigenous knowledge. They were aware that the learning within the university setting has marginalized the local cultural values, beliefs, non-verbal and background knowledge (Ray, 2007). The sensation of teacher educators has informed the students to learn social truths in the society through their everyday living, but they are imposed to learn universal truth through textual learning (Koirala, 2003). It is due to the university that has become a legitimized structure mediating the power of Western modern worldviews to shape the ways of knowing for students of the margin. Such a hegemony as a perpetuation of invisible control over the education system of higher education in Nepal is excluding non-Western and indigenous knowledge through the process of homogenization.

In addition, in many cases, the teacher educators used assessment practices as means of learning. As understood from the discussion in the Webinars, they experienced that they have been incorporating indigenous knowledge into their assessment practices. Specifically, one teacher shared that he often allowed students to conduct research on indigenous knowledge and community practices of Muslim communities. Another teacher educator from Kailali Multiple Campus noted, “Our students submit the project work related to indigenous knowledge on the course ‘Ed. 541: Contemporary Educational Issues’. The concepts of indigenous knowledge are explored by the students in their cultural heritage and events.” As understood from the sharing of other teacher educators, many of them have adopted largely the performance-based assessment practices providing specific tasks (Buhagiar, 2007) of writing and engagement in reading for creating

academic notes or papers. Students most often were engaged in classroom presentations on particular given themes, writing papers and reflective notes, project works, group works and sharing of community issues and practices. Further, the new courses envisaged engaging students in analysis, synthesis, and creation of academic tasks. The teacher educators were more democratic in terms of respecting and valuing the needs and interests of the students while doing assignments. They have allowed students to write indigenous culture and knowledge systems as assignments.

The teacher educators shared the possibility of integrating indigenous knowledge through providing community-based project works. Many of them have been encouraging their students to write papers and reports from the lens of indigenous knowledge. They have allowed students to explore knowledge attached to herbs, agricultural tools, and classical practices regarding purification, dieting, etc. One of the teacher educators highlighted one of his practices thus:

The practice of non-Western knowledge in our teaching-learning process is satisfactory. I invited a knowledgeable person of The Quran, the major holy text of Islam, to share the ideas and it was so effective classroom.

However, these practices of inviting community elders were less in other campuses of different parts of the country. We sensed that the practices of inviting community elders and other knowledgeable persons from indigenous communities were guided by the course contents. There were a few contents of indigenous and non-Western knowledge in the curriculums and hence there was less chance of inviting such experts in the classrooms.

The inequality in terms of integrating indigenous and non-Western knowledge through undemocratic pedagogical and assessment practices was visible (as the perspectives of teacher educators) in higher education in Nepal. However, the teacher educators were in favor of struggling and responding to the standard, rigid, structured, time-bound, and objective nature of assessment practices which have promoted injustice to the students who have multiple indigenous and non-Western beliefs, knowledge, and worldviews. The narrowly conceived paper-pencil-based assessment models have a focus on testing specific knowledge and skills through teacher-made or standardized tests thereby, paralyzing the knowledge of students' competencies as a whole (Luitel, 2009). The teacher

educators have recognized that the emphasis on testing the content of textbooks has ignored the students' conceptualization of ideas developed based on indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing. They have begun to act on promoting flexible assessment practices against the testing of mastery of basic skills in order to achieve higher aggregate scores on standardized tests (Johnson, 2005).

## **Conclusion**

There is increasing awareness on external domination of ideas and practices of education among teacher educators, particularly those who have been engaging in teaching core courses in the Faculty of Education at the Master of Education (M.Ed.) level. They have a realization of the hegemony created by Western modern knowledge and hence they have initiated the actions of reclaiming their indigenous and non-Western knowledge through curricular practices. They have negotiated, resisted, and responded to invisible power even in the structural uncondusive educational environment. The university as the structure has been perpetuated by the Western model of academic practices. However, teacher educators have attempted to promote their dreams of decolonization through curricular practices. However, still, there is the supremacy of Western modern knowledge and ways of knowing. The university structure needs to think about promoting equity and inclusion of indigenous and non-Western knowledge and ways of knowing. This stimulates justice to the colonized others thereby facilitating meaningful learning and quality education. The emphasis given to curriculum development endorsing local contextual knowledge facilitates the transformation of educational practices.

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