

Report on the Meeting of the Project Country Partners with Policy Makers

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Background

Computer has been introduced as an optional subject in the secondary level school education of Nepal. Basically, computer subject in the secondary level used to cover grades IX and X, until quite recently, after the national testing body, the Office of the Controller of Examinations under the Ministry of Education and Sports decided to set questions only from course material taught in grade X . However, as far as the implementation of the computer in terms of teaching and learning is concerned, it has merely been a program for program sake. There is a clear cut curriculum set by the Curriculum Development Center (CDC), yet there seems to be a big disparity in between government run schools and private schools in terms of implementation. While the CDC prescribes its own book and this is what is followed in government schools, private schools have been following their own set of books which are most close to the curriculum. Of late, there have been complaints from the educationists and other related stakeholders that the curriculum is greatly outdated, lacks information on the latest state-of-the-art technologies and since is highly vendor oriented there have been practical difficulties to go for different alternative tools for teaching and learning purpose of the materials included in the curriculum. Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya (MPP) as part of its regular program of conducting a meeting with Policy Makers and Stakeholders on policy level issues, decided to make the main agenda this time as being, “Computer Curriculum in Schools”. Key persons from CDC, High Level Commission for Information Technology (HLCIT), FOSS Nepal Community, school representatives, E-Network Research and Development etc. were invited as participants of the meeting.

Chief Agenda of the meeting

Computer Curriculum in Schools

Sub agendas of the meeting

- Review of the existing school curriculum
- Discussion on what is lacking in the current curriculum
- Constraints and difficulties in implementing the curriculum in schools
- Information gathering about the procedures of curriculum development and revision
- How to move ahead?

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Minutes of the meeting proceedings

On September 24, 2008 a meeting of the Policy Makers and stakeholders was conducted at Yalamaya Kendra, Lalitpur, PatanDhoka.

This meeting was moderated by Bal Krishna Bal from MPP. Key persons present in the meeting were Member Secretary, HLCIT – Dr. Madan Pariyar, Chairman, E-Network Research and Development –

Mr. Rajendra Poudel, President, FOSS Nepal Community – Mr. Subir Bahadur Pradhanang, representatives from CDC and representatives from schools.

Meeting proceedings:

The meeting proceedings are as follows:

1. The meeting started by a brief overview on the agendas by Bal Krishna Bal. The agenda notes were also provided to the participants. Entering to the agendas of the meeting, Mr. Bal noted that schools implementing the latest Linux Terminal Server Project (LTSP) labs under different programs were not able to run in a full fledged manner simply because the existing curriculum poses constraints such as the necessity to teach certain proprietary software unavailable under the LTSP system. Since the LTSP technology based program is highly replicable and feasible in terms of the usage of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) and cheap hardware, the number of schools or other sites adopting the technology already numbers more than 40 and is ever increasing. Further getting into the sub agendas, Mr. Bal added that if the current curriculum were made tasks oriented (Word Processing rather than MS Word, Spread Sheet rather than MS Excel, Database Management Systems rather than MS Access) rather than vendor dependent, these schools could have the liberty use any of the available applications be it proprietary or Free and Open Source. Besides, Mr. Bal also threw light on the need to include and introduce FOSS and other latest state of the art technologies in the curriculum.
2. This was followed by the experience sharing session from school representatives where the issue of making the curriculum tasks oriented rather than vendor dependent was echoed by the majority of the participants. They also complained that the current curriculum reflects just a high or macro level and this needed to be broken down into the micro level clearly mentioning the weight of marks to each unit. The issue of the need to remove some of the outdated topics like the DOS operating system was also raised. They also revealed that since they were not necessarily abided by the school curriculum till grade IX, they have been introducing the subject as per their own plan till grade IX. As a result of which there seem to be some practical difficulties in switching students to a more restricted domain of knowledge transfer in grade X. As practically every task can be accomplished using Free and Open Source Software, some of the school representatives were even ready to completely replace the traditional proprietary tools with Free and Open Source Software. However, before this can realize, the curriculum has to be revised. One of the participants also shared the bitter incident of one of his colleagues being kept aloof by the school staff and other officials for having tried to introduce Free and Open Source because of their ignorance on Free and Open Source Software. Some of the participants even suggested that the CDC conducted a surprise visits to the concerned schools for monitoring and evaluation purposes of the implementation of the curriculum and relevant programs.
3. After the experience sharing session from school representatives, the meeting proceeded to the discussion on the agendas of the meeting. The CDC representatives were asked to put forth their opinions and give an insight to the curriculum development and revision process. They revealed that there is indeed a prescribed book for the subject developed by CDC itself. However, different schools and private ones in particular seem to be following their own books. At this, the school representatives opined that the prime cause for the unpopularity of the CDC

prescribed book was that the English and Nepali versions of the book did not conform each other in terms of material coverage and translation. Besides, the CDC prescribed book also does not seem to have a wide coverage of materials as reported by the school representatives. The CDC representatives informed that the curriculum usually got revised after a span of 10 years and the next immediate revision of the current one was due next year until and unless things change in the policy level from the government. They suggested the concerned stakeholders to file suggestions which were bound to be considered in the next revision. However, they opined that a high policy level directive had to be issued to make any drastic revision since the curriculum had to address all the schools throughout the country and this means taking into consideration the different levels of competence and skills of the school teachers. Other participants were of the opinion that vendor neutrality in the curriculum could address all levels of human resource competencies, basically among the teachers. Dr. Madan Pariyar pledged to extend all forms of support required on behalf of HLCIT as the apex body for making crucial policy level decisions in IT. He suggested to take up this issue of curriculum development from a long term perspective rather than just meeting temporary goals and objectives. However, CDC representatives revealed that the curriculum development or revision is in itself a very long and complicated process involving multiple – about 12 to 13 different levels finally after which a curriculum formally comes out.

4. Finally on “How to move ahead?”, the meeting came to the following conclusions as a result of the discussion:
 - Initiate to form a suggestion giving committee of all concerned stakeholders. MPP to take the initiative. To start with, MPP would be calling for a meeting of all the school representatives attending the meeting and then a committee would be formed in which MPP would also remain a member. It would be the responsibility of the committee to take up the curriculum issue further to different levels required.
 - This committee will discuss and file the suggestions to CDC.
 - This committee will co-operate with CDC and make the necessary effort and co-ordination for lobbying its views and suggestions.
 - It was also suggested that a separate committee also be formed comprising high level policy makers which would be substantial in contributing towards a major change in the curriculum, for instance, the introduction of FOSS and other latest technologies. However, the meeting did not elaborate on the formulation of such a committee.

List of participants of the meeting

1. Dr. Madan Pariyar, Member Secretary, High Level Commission for Information Technology (HLCIT)
2. Mr. Bishnu Prasad Adhikari and Mr. Ganesh Prasad Bhattarai. Representatives from the Curriculum Development Center (CDC).
3. Mr. Rajendra Poudel, Chairman, E-Network Research and Development (ENRD).
4. Mr. Subir Bahadur Pradhanang, President, FOSS Nepal Community.
5. Mr. Prabin Raj Joshi. Representative from Brihaspati Vidya Sadan.

6. Mr. Ravi Maharjan. Representative from Whitefield school.
7. Mr. Suresh Kumar Shrestha. Representative from Adarsha Vidya Mandir school.
8. Mr. Nabin Man Malla. Representative from Rato Bangla School.
9. Mr. Reg Bhandari. Representative from Little Angel's School.
10. Mr. Basanta Shrestha. Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya.
11. Mr. Sharad Bhusal. Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya.
12. Bal Krishna Bal. Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya.

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