



*Research Article/ Higher Education*

## **Progressive Pedagogy and Student-Centred Learning in Higher Education in Nepal**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The changes have taken place in higher education due to globalization, technological development, and shifting workforce demand. The traditional one-way lecturer-centered pedagogy is less adequate in preparing students to address the 21st-century requirements of critical thinking, teamwork, and lifelong learning. This paper aims to explore the potential and practice of progressive pedagogy in an under-resourced institution of higher education in Nepal using the Deweyan philosophy of experientialism. Higher

education faces a critical challenge in overcoming the limitations of traditional lecturer-centred pedagogy. Qualitative approaches were used to interview five experienced teachers at Myagdi Multiple Campus, Beni Bazaar, Nepal, employing a thematic analysis to determine the significant pedagogical practices. Eight central themes were identified: transforming the nature of authority of the teacher into a facilitator, experiential learning through workshops, democratic management of the classroom, learning that corresponds with the real world, formative holistic assessment, adaptation to technology, relationship pedagogy, and transformation advocacy. This study showed that progressive pedagogy which is a viable pathway in transforming higher education in Nepal to prepare students for global competitiveness, has been practiced despite the size, resources, and cultural issues, reflecting how global educational theories and practices are being interpreted from a South Asian perspective.

**KEYWORDS:** Progressive pedagogy, experiential learning, student-centred education, Deweyan philosophy

### **INTRODUCTION**

Owing to globalization, technological advancement, and shifting workforce demand, the knowledge economy has changed, seeking transformation in higher education, yet, teachers in many higher education institutions are employing the

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traditional pedagogical practices, making students passive listeners in the construction of knowledge (Birru, 2024; Rivas et al., 2025). Such practices, though popular, are not sufficient to fulfil the need for 21st-century life skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy, which are prerequisites to prepare students for global competitiveness. Moreover, lifelong learning and interdisciplinary competencies focus on the reform in pedagogical practices to enable students to cope with a rapidly evolving world beyond immediate employment.

There exist dominant authoritative teacher-centred pedagogies, especially lecture methods, in higher educational institutions of Nepal and South Asia (Shrestha, 2019; Thapa, 2021). Historically, universities such as Tribhuvan University and its affiliated campuses have been employing didactic teaching (Bista, 2011). They deliver content in a large classroom with limited opportunities for student participation and dialogue (Parajuli, 2020). Generally, university teachers enter the classroom, write down their topic on the white board and give lectures on the topic. Students sit passively and listen to their teachers. They prepare notes based on what their teachers have delivered and memorize it. In this way, the memorization of information is taken as the best form of learning (Sharma, 2017). During exams, students present what they have learned in their papers, and marks are awarded to declare pass or fail. Teachers can deliver a good deal of contents within the given period. Thus, so far pedagogical practice is knowledge-oriented. Students cannot learn the skills, which are useful practically in their lives. Students have limited opportunities to develop problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaborative skills (Pant, 2018). These practices reflect broader South Asian educational traditions shaped by hierarchical classroom

dynamics and honour for authoritative class environment (Jayawardena, 2015).

However, the shift towards more progressive pedagogical practices has gradually taken place recently (Kumar, 2022). Higher education institutions (HEIs) like Myagdi Multiple Campus (MMC) have started to adopt constructive pedagogical practices and assessment tools to promote deeper and sustainable learning (Adhikari, 2021). These practices provide students with opportunities to engage in reflective and collaborative learning. Student-centred strategies such as project-based learning, group discussion, and presentations are getting more popularity in universities, promoting innovation and global competitiveness (Joshi, 2020).

The HEIs were compelled to integrate digital tools and online platforms in their instructional practices due to COVID-19 pandemic (Dhakal, 2021). Similarly, policy reforms in higher education emphasized the significance of experimental, learning and inclusive pedagogy (Ministry of Education, 2020). The participation of HEIs in accreditation journey as part of their total quality management required them to introduce progressive pedagogies for qualitative transformation (UGC Nepal, 2019). In this context, this study aims to investigate the use of progressive pedagogy and student-centred learning in HEIs of Nepal.

Pedagogy refers to the art, science, and ethical practice of teaching, which goes further than purely instructional techniques to include the relational and moral dimensions of facilitating learning. It means that finding the constructive ways to navigate inherent tensions between authority and autonomy, or between the structure and flexibility, to foster growth and development. Pedagogy should not be confined to the classroom. It occurs in everyday interactions, emphasizing the holistic learner development. This foundational concept supports a wide range of teaching philosophies, including

progressive pedagogy, which reconceptualises education as a dynamic process with learners at the centre.

Progressive pedagogy is an educational approach. According to John Dewey, “Progressive pedagogy emphasizes learning by experience and discovery rather than memorization, engaging students actively in constructing their own learning” (cited in Chua, 2024). Learning and teaching in a learner-centred way, incorporating action, reflection, and connections to promote creativity, flexibility, social justice, and adaptability. In traditional pedagogy, learning is one-way and knowledge is transferred from teachers to students. In progressive learning, it is active and seeks to address the issues of social responsibility and change through application and action in and with community and in everyday life (Chua, 2024). This is reflected in thematic learning projects, feedback loops, and multiple learning goals linked to the interests and needs of learners and the community. However, the progressive learning model in education is to address the needs of the 21st century, in terms of critical and creative thinking, collaboration, and resilience in the face of rapid technological and social changes. Experiments have shown that students respond better and retain more in student-centered learning models (Chua, 2024). These models focus on self-directed learning.

The main objective of this paper is to explore the use of progressive pedagogy by teachers of MMC based on a semi-urban higher education environment with limited resources. In particular, the study examines the change in the roles of teachers to adopt the student-centred and facilitative practices and the use of experiential workshop models. It also aims to analyze the democratic methods of classroom management and relational pedagogy practices that promote inclusiveness, student voice, and students’

holistic development. The paper analyses formative assessment methods and adaptive use of technology that facilitate learning within the constraints of infrastructures. It also seeks to interpret teacher-based advocacy and institutional change processes that can help instil progressive pedagogies in the overall structure of quality improvement in Nepali higher education.

Against this background, there are teacher-centered learning styles, particularly using lectures, where the focus is more on delivering information rather than promoting reflection and interaction among students. Therefore, students become passive learners in their classrooms and lack the chances to develop reflective and collaborative skills. On the other hand, teaching has shifted to progressive pedagogy, including the implementation of a project work method and collaborative learning through discussion and presentation. The use of technologies in learning has contributed immensely towards this transformation as well. Besides, policy changes and accreditation criteria have also contributed to this facilitation. Therefore, the study assesses progressive pedagogy and student-centered learning in HEIs in Nepal.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The university teachers’ interest in progressive pedagogy and learner-centered approaches has been growing in the South Asian HEIs, more specifically in Nepal, in regard to alternative pedagogies in contrast with teacher-centered pedagogies associated with colonialism, class size, and hierarchical principles.

Developed by John Dewey and Lev Vygotsky, progressive pedagogy promotes student-centered learning, active learning, and the social construction of knowledge as an alternative to the traditional, teacher-dominated method of higher education. As an example, Huda and Sariyatun (2025)

present that progressive pedagogies facilitate learner agency and inclusiveness, based on the Deweyan experiential education to incorporate digital technologies towards active knowledge construction. Likewise, Bassett (2024) highlights the Vygotsky's zone of proximal development as a critical aspect in the collaborative higher education practice that goes beyond rote memorization and allows students to internalize the scientific concepts by being guided on the social interactions.

The main concepts of progressive pedagogy in higher education are personalization, interdisciplinarity, and project-based learning, which can change the emphasis on the content delivery to the development of skills and their practical implementation. These aspects promote self-directed learning and emotional intelligence in learners by encouraging teachers to be facilitators instead of dictators.

Pokhrel (2022) conducted an analysis of awareness among the Nepali science teacher educators regarding the principles of active learning and culturally responsive teaching methods with the use of multiple case studies. Despite some theoretical insights, little practical implementation of these pedagogical strategies occurred because of the hierarchical principles, lack of resources, and professional development. Furthermore, Phuyal (2026) advocated for the change in pedagogy among the Nepali community college teachers through adopting the learner-centered strategies. According to Phuyal (2026), the proposed strategies will contribute greatly to improved teaching in the resource scarce contexts.

Mouni (2025) deals with learner agency of the English language learners in Nepal, utilizing the qualitative methodology. The researcher found low levels of student agency because of teacher-centered instruction, examination

focused learning, and low self-confidence among students. Curle and Paudel (2025) analyzed blended learning among the Nepali HEIs. They found the student preferences toward interactivity and student centeredness in addition to various barriers to its adoption such as infrastructure deficits and low digital literacy levels. Moreover, Aryal (2023) examined critical pedagogy in the Nepali university classroom setting, stating that a learner-centred approach may encourage students' interaction and critical thinking abilities, although it is likely to encounter opposition in regard to the power dynamics.

Likewise, Paudel (2024) highlighted the existing gap between curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in Nepal, which perpetuates teacher-centeredness. Concerning the overall South Asian context, Biase (2018) successfully introduced the structure of active learning into the classrooms of Maldives, exemplifying how much better the results can be if one manages to step away from the traditional debate about teacher-centered versus learner-centered approaches in a hierarchical culture. Akram et al. (2024) carried out structural equation modelling among the Pakistani university students and found a high predictability of student engagement based on positive and dialogic interpersonal relationships between teacher and student in the student-centered virtual learning space.

Prakasha (2022) noticed a high level of student engagement among Indian teacher education program participants trained by their instructors in active learning techniques. Moreover, Bremner's (2022) systematic review of the effectiveness of learner-centered pedagogical practices in low-and middle-income countries showed that, although modifications of the concept were necessary, they usually led to better student motivation and performance

results, moderating the impact on the class size and quality of instructor training. Finally, a comparative analysis of teacher education policies in South Asia made by Neupane (2022) identified common obstacles, like exam-oriented content and insufficient teacher training, along with the emergence of learner autonomy-related policies.

Thus, the empirical studies mentioned above define student-centered learning as an active approach, involving peer, flipped classroom, or project-based learning, technology and assessments as motivational devices. Overall, this literature review suggests a strong empirical evidence that the application of progressive pedagogical strategies has positive effects on student engagement, motivation, and self-responsibility within the Nepali context. However, the use of strategies faces serious constraints associated with cultural hierarchy, lack of infrastructure, and examination systems, and the absence of necessary training for teachers. Thus, this study is logically and practically justified since there is a need for empirical studies on the teachers' role change and implementation processes of student-centered strategies within the HEIs in Nepal.

Frequently, empirical implementations of progressive pedagogy in higher education take the form of reflective practices and community-based projects, with better student outcomes. Huda and Sariyatun (2025) demonstrate the advantage of blended digital programs, including online forums of critical reflection, in areas of philosophy and arts education, another cornerstone of project-based learning incorporates socio-cultural analysis within virtual space, as the case of Bocharov (2023). It is an example of collaborative virtual environment that reflects the principles of Vygotskian. Although progressive in theory, the elements like the infrastructural barriers, old systems, and even the training of

teachers to overcome digital inequities pose the problems to progressive pedagogy in higher education. Huda and Sariyatun (2025) note that there are strains associated with the implementation of these approaches, such as insufficient resources whereas Bassett (2024) criticizes the neoliberal pressures to promote standardization over innovativeness.

The existing research on progressive pedagogy in higher education has theorized learner-centered teaching, experiential education, democratic classroom teaching, formative assessment, and the use of technology in educational systems, mostly in western settings. Although the subject of digital transformation, equity, and human-centered artificial intelligence is being studied more recently, there is still little availability of empirical data on the implementation of these progressive ideals in the under-resourced semi-urban community campuses of South Asia, specifically in the Nepali higher education system. Furthermore, most of the existing literature has focused on the policy structures, curriculum changes, and student achievement, but comparatively the limited focus has been given to the lived experiences of university teachers, pedagogical skills, and advocacy practices within limited institutional settings. This has led to a lack of knowledge on how progressive pedagogy is perceived, negotiated, and maintained by university teachers who have infrastructural constraints, high student enrolment, and cultural pressures that have been supported by traditional teaching approaches.

Based on the gap identified, this study investigated how progressive pedagogy is practiced and maintained by members of the faculty in a community HEIs with limited resources. In particular, it examines the ways of reconceptualization of the roles played by teachers at MMC. The paper also explores the application of democratic principles in classroom

management and the contextualization of learning in real-life experiences in order to make learning more relevant and engaging for students. Moreover, it discusses the nature of holistic and formative assessment practices and how the available technologies can be integrated to facilitate progressive learning outcomes despite infrastructural limitations. It also studies how university teachers can be involved in reflective practice and institutional advocacy to reduce systemic obstacles and advance the sustainability of progressive pedagogical principles in under-resourced institutions of higher learning.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative design to address the issue of pedagogy in higher education from the perspective of progressive pedagogy. Purposive sampling was used to recruit the respondents with a considerable amount of expertise related to pedagogy in higher education (Patton, 2015). A total of five teachers were chosen from MMC because of their rich experience in different subjects to obtain diverse perspectives related to progressive pedagogy. Participants were chosen because they were teachers with more than a decade of experience in higher education teaching with appropriate gender balance (F=3; M=2). They were selected using direct institution contact with the selection criterion of at least 10 years of teaching in the higher education sector in order to be conversant with changing trends in teaching.

The study used semi-structured, in-depth interviews for obtaining personal, narrative responses, and reflections for pedagogical practices (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews in the campus office in a quiet and private environment. The study used an interview guide designed according to progressive pedagogies, including open-ended questions. All the interviews were audio-

recorded with the consent and convenience of the participant in either English or Nepali, as preferred by the participant. The field notes were taken as soon as the participant left the interview session

For data analysis, six-phase thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006) was used, which offered a comprehensive and flexible approach for data analysis. The researcher transcribed the audio-recorded interviews verbatim and read them repeatedly to ensure immersion in the data and accuracy in the findings. Initial coding was undertaken, and this was carried out manually by selecting significant parts. Coding was then synthesized into themes and categories that highlighted emerging pedagogical themes. Themes were refined using a constant comparison to ensure internal consistency and distinctiveness, and extracts were used to support each emerging theme. Interpretations were made by placing the emerging themes in the context of progressive pedagogy theory, which provided in-depth data analysis and moved beyond descriptions. To ensure trustworthiness, an audit trail was used, and peer debriefing was undertaken to ensure that the findings were accurate.

## RESULTS

The findings from the interviews with teachers at MMC reveal a dynamic shift in pedagogical practices toward progressive, student-centered approaches. Despite the institutional constraints, the participants consistently emphasized active engagement, experiential learning, democratic classroom management, and contextual relevance. Their reflections illustrate how progressive philosophies rooted in inquiry-based learning of Dewey are being adapted within the Nepali higher education context. The following themes highlight the transformative practices, challenges, and aspirations of these educators as they navigate a tension

between traditional lecture-based methods and contemporary, participatory models of teaching.

### **Theme 1. Shift to Teacher as Facilitator and Student-Centered Learning**

Progressive pedagogy reconceptualises the role of teacher more as a guide on the side rather than the sage on the stage. It encourages an active construction of knowledge by students. Regarding it, one of the participants stated, "In the past, keeping students silent and only the teacher is speaking, that was important. But later, I knew that students need to be more proactive than the teacher. So, the teacher's role there should be as a facilitator, not as a controller" (T. Sapkota, personal communication, December 8, 2025).

He emphasizes rediscovery of existing knowledge before proceeding further on new content and engages students through tasks, such as classwork, making presentation, going for fieldwork, and telling their experiences firsthand, since mere lecturing leads to less remembrance comparing to active participation. This is in line with Dewey's specification of inquiry-based learning wherein students share the same level of responsibilities in constructing new knowledge.

P. Dhakal (Personal communication, December 7, 2025) contrastingly elucidates the difference between his former lecture methods, an established method in higher education to his student-centered method. "This new approach places an emphasis on students, reflecting the progressive approach to education, which has repudiated passive forms of learning to embrace inquiry-based models." In this respect, Dhakal's acknowledging of dominance of lecture method highlights the critical role of self-reflection of teachers. In this respect, one of the teachers exemplifies, "ESA sequence: Engage students first. Then study them. And activate them. I use, uh,

student-centered method using ESA sequencer. Engaging, studying, and activating students" (M. Rizal, personal communication, December 5, 2025).

This ESA sequence is practical application of Dewey's "learning by doing," with an aim to promoting and inspiring curiosity through teachers' experience and groups of acquired skills. In it the move is towards the use of passive to the use of active methods; this highlights the approach that the classroom should be the location for democratic meaning-making and not mere transmission. In this respect, one of the participant states, "The curriculum is stimulated and connected to students" (B. Roka, personal communication, December 7, 2025). Here, another participant states, "I use, uh, the student-centered method using ESA sequencer. I incorporate different activities: Sometimes I give them project work, sometimes I do the debate, and sometimes I do class discussion and lectures" (M. Rizal, personal communication, December 5, 2025).

This reflects Dewey's role in promoting 'learning by doing' where "engage, study, activate" are encouraged to evoke curiosity based on their experience, skills acquired collectively, to apply acquired knowledge creatively. This move reflects the transformation from passive to active techniques, reflecting need for classrooms to be democratic meaning-making sites rather than simply content delivery sites. Another participant captures this concept in this way: "...The curriculum is spurred and linked to students' present life experiences, problems, and interests. This is because integrating real-life situations stimulates students to realize the relevance of education outside the classroom" (B. Roka, personal communication, December 7, 2025). This strategy is used deliberately in order to address specific needs and challenges of students, such as the teenage and youth stages. The instructional value

of this strategy was echoed by another participant who says, “By including these matters in relation to everyday life experiences, needs, and interests in the class; the class can be made interesting, and students can be drawn towards the class of teaching-learning activities.” (R. Regmi, personal communication, January 4, 2026). This sort of curricular responsiveness links teaching with students’ curiosities and makes learning more meaningful individually.

## **Theme 2. Experiential and Collaborative Engagement through Workshop Models**

A basic foundation of progressive education is hands-on, collaborative experiences that cultivate skills through active practice. The workshop model has affinity to this theme serving as a pedagogical tool for operationalizing the principle. Regarding the model of workshop, a university teacher said,

On the first day, I give assignments to divided groups, who prepare the assignments at home, discuss in the classroom for 10-15 minutes and give their presentation, and I in turn, give feedback in the following sessions. Many students had written such a good type of answer... had it not been explained to them by me alone... they would not have written such a good type of answer” (T. Sapkota, personal communication, December 8, 2025).

This group-oriented, iterative process facilitates deeper retention and creativity, and reflects the progressive philosophies of learning as a social and problem-solving process and not rote transference. Focusing on this structured collaboration, one participant stated, “I improve cooperation... adopting parametric orders and systematic directions...encouragement of collaboration and enhancing interaction with peers” (B. Roka, personal communication, December 7, 2025).

Regarding the workshop model, P. Dhakal (Personal communication, December 7, 2025) added: “Students themselves choose the topic; they make the proper preparation; and they deliver the material via PowerPoint slides. In the process, students feel really motivated and satisfied”.

The choice of the topics by students brings self-motivation, and during their preparation and presentation, they are encouraged to develop such skills as research, communication, and peer feedback, which are the characteristics of the Deweyan experiential cycle: doing, reflecting, applying. This has reversed the effect of rote learning and has made the classroom a community of learners. Moreover, providing autonomy to students triggers intrinsic motivation. Employing this collaborative and experimental model recognises the identity of an individual learner. According to R. Regmi (personal communication, January 4, 2026), “Every student is an individual. Each person possesses unique talents, interests, and abilities... develop a climate in which we feel, I am something; I am special.” In order to support this collaborative learning, she offers an integration of extracurricular activities based on the areas of students’ interest when it comes to the activities in the class and small tasks on a regular basis to reinforce engagement and a sense of personal value.

## **Theme 3. Democratic Classroom Management**

Valuing all voices and inclusive participation is a feature of progressive pedagogy. In it, the classroom is conceptualized as a miniature democracy in which the contribution of each student is valued to enrich the general intelligence. In this connection, one of the participants reported, “Whatever they are saying I write down on the white board. And I like them... your reply may be... useful to others. So, don't hesitate” (T. Sapkota,

personal communication, December 8, 2025).

He democratically gathers the ideas, synthesizes them, and draws conclusions collaboratively. He allows students to express themselves. Whatever the answer is, right or wrong, it does not matter. But speaking is important.

This is a practice that opposes teaching in a hierarchical way and encourages equity and critical conversations, similar to community of inquiry, introduced by Dewey. Articulating this student-centred voice, one participant emphasizes the role of affirmative feedback stating as follows,

Um, I provide them with positive feedback. I usually advise students most of the time, telling them value to them, what they have, uh, some students are so good at speaking. I admire the way they talk, uh, and, and make them speak. Others are quite superb in, uh, other things such as, um, reading, presenting, Uh, uh, I encourage them, uh, giving value... what they have. (M. Rizal, personal communication, December 5, 2025).

While discussing the challenges of maintaining democratic principles in practice at the moment of disruption, R. Regmi (personal communication, January 4, 2026) explained, "In noisy environments, I aim at students speaking loudly or distracting with specific questions, to redirect attention of other participants to the group, to control without leaving student-centered approaches." This approach mirrors the progressive interpretation and makes management of a collaborative governance. Moreover, it is the way to teach conflict resolution and accountability. It does not tend to return to authoritarian control, but maintains student agency under logistical limitations.

#### **Theme 4. Contextualization and Relationship to Real Life Experience**

To have a significant change, education should bridge the gap between abstract knowledge and the realities of life of students, which is one of the major principles of progressive thought. Being an English teacher who teaches the foreign texts such as American or British realities, one of the participants insists on relating them to the real-life situation, society, and experiences of students. Providing his own anecdotes to facilitate this thought, he said, "I emphasize the importance of contextualization to a literary text, using general meaning to local Nepali situations, so that one can change their situation as well" (T. Sapkota, personal communication, December 8, 2025).

This is a way of bridging the cultural differences, making learning emancipatory and useful, as in his homework where students are asked to compare American values and assumptions with Nepali values and assumptions or tell them what an American visitor... should know before coming to Nepal. To elaborate the same principle, R. Regmi (personal communication, January 4, 2026) says,

I prepare the right environment to teach, such as teenagers, most teens and youths have games they are curious about, or they might have psychological issues, right? In case these concerns are connected to the lesson or the subject matter, students experience that their own life and experience are tied through their teaching to create critical and ethical citizens who can solve problems.

Likewise, one of the participants, expressing the similar life-centred pedagogical principle, clearly stated,

I am trying to make my students and contents connected to the real-life experiences so that they also become well-aware, disciplined and critical, and address problems in life bravely and wisely. In fact, we teach the life

centred. Such integration in health and pedagogy courses creates resilience and wisdom and converts abstract ideas, e.g., psychological theories, into individual and social problem-solving tools. (P. Dhakal, personal communication, December 7, 2025)

This remark depicts that contextualization is a basic orientation that transforms abstract theories into practical instruments. It represents the emancipatory desire of progressive education. Knowledge is not an end in itself but it is a means to wise engagement with the world.

### **Theme 5. Holistic and Formative Assessment beyond Summative Exams**

Progressive assessment is an integral part of the learning process. It emphasizes growth, progress, and real-world application of knowledge, viewing an assessment for learning not of learning. It is continuous, natural, and multi-dimensional and measures progress and not only recall. One participant articulated this approach by portraying how he weaves assessment into daily lessons:

In addition to summative evaluation, daily end-of-lesson questions i.e. yes/no, multiple-choice, class testing, and homework, which involves real-world application, i.e. text contextualization in Nepali life are part of my lesson plans, as I believe assessment is the motivating force of learning. They are the aspects of the lesson plan anyway. (T. Sapkota, personal communication, December 8, 2025)

This is a formative method, which is consistent with the progressive perspectives on evaluation as a reflective and corrective instrument, rather than a grading instrument. Progressive assessment is a multifaceted feedback-based assessment, which deals with development and not evaluation.

Regarding the use of varied instruments in evaluation, one participant said,

Besides conventional exams, I use classwork, assignment, unit test, and project work enhanced by, regular feedback. Specifically, projects can be associated with experiential learning where students can apply theory into real-world problems, e.g., health project where theory is applied to community problems. (P.Dhakal, personal communication, December 7, 2025)

This versatile instrumentation facilitates the forward-looking concepts of evaluation as a dialogic procedure, steering an enhanced process of improvement and acknowledging different abilities. R. Regmi (personal communication, January 4, 2026) also emphasized the use of informal and participatory procedures of assessment who stated, “In addition to terminal examinations, I evaluate using questions and answers during discussions, assignments, and participation in discussions. My other emphasis includes that assessment ought to be viewed as a major foundation and that the good work needs to be praised.”

B. Roka (personal communication, December 7, 2025), on the other hand, focused on the importance of transparency and relation between criteria of assessment and capacity of students comments as she said, “Informal, regular assessments, and discussions... evaluation embraces ongoing participation and involvement. The criteria of the assessment should be clear and correspond to the ability and motivation of students.” Highlighting the inclusion of oral and performative elements, another participant explained, “Exam is the main part. Then following it, I will have oral... assessment... inquiry... show them their... project presentation... provide them project works. Their speaking, their acting, how they do their work” (M. Rizal,

personal communication, December 5, 2025). In progressive terms, measurement is continuous and multidimensional, not summative tests but a growth instrument. The methodology of Rizal puts more emphasis on process, which evaluates social-emotional skills. It is a re-echo of Dewey, who argues against the use of standardized testing in favour of more authentic, portfolio-like assessment.

#### **Theme 6. Technology as an Enabler (with Resource Barriers)**

As progressive pedagogy includes the use of tools that improve accessibility and inquiry, the absence of technological resources creates an equity problem. Regarding the use of technology, a participant states, "I use the technology at hand viz. PowerPoint, mobile devices, laptop/internet connection, with occasional certain purposes and to demonstrate other examples" (T. Sapkota, personal communication, December 8, 2025). Regarding how technology facilitates student-centred learning, another participant adds, "Students select the topic and they prepare required presentation and present the content using power-point slides" (P Dhakal, personal communication, December 7, 2025). In the case of the limitations caused by lack of technological devices, T. Sapkota (personal communication, December 8, 2025) further expresses, "Nevertheless, the lack of, or insufficient, smart boards or a Language Lab, compel me follow lecture method in communicative subjects: I have to go back and... follow the lecture method. However, that is not the one to discuss the lecture method." Thus, he supports the idea of internet connected classrooms, showing how the lack of resources creates barriers to student-centered practices, a regular progressive criticism of the systemic barriers to equitable education.

#### **Theme 7. Relational Pedagogy: Growing Affective Relationships between Teachers and Students**

One of the fundamental progressive principles is the teacher-student relationship as a form of democratic partnership in which sensitivity and informality nurture trust, which in turn also results in the co-construction of knowledge. One of the participants suggests the replacement of authoritative distance with the empathetic proximity and humanization of the educator role. She expresses,

Students believe that their lives and feelings are interrelated in terms of the teaching. They also come to have feelings of closeness and intimacy with the teacher. I have become less formal and more informal, sharing personal experiences to work closely with them. (R. Regmi, personal communication, January 4, 2026)

This represents the dialogical education of Paulo Freire, opposed to the banking model of education. It means that the teacher as a depositor. It situates teacher as a guide, who openly encourages students to the process of learning. To elaborate this openness, a participant says,

I give examples from the society most of the time... I attempt to connect their theoretical learning with the society... Do you like English so do you like, uh, teaching? What does it mean to be a good teacher? ... Would you say... your best teacher? (M. Rizal, personal communication, December 5, 2025)

This is similar to the progressive experientialism where education is a reflection of life issues to develop the critical citizenry. The open-ended and reflective questions help Rizal promote metacognitive and emphatic thinking, making abstract English methodology a means of individual and social development, a way of promoting trust and motivation.

Emphasizing the significance of relational pedagogy, B. Roka (personal communication, December 7, 2025) comments, "When students gain a sense of intimacy and personal relationship with teachers... emotional and informal relationships help increase more engagement and interest." Pedagogically, this is based on the attachment theory in education, where the rapport lowers the affective obstacles to learning and promotes sensitivity to inquiry. Therefore, sharing experiences with students is one of the ways of establishing a mutual understanding.

### **Theme 8. Reflective Challenges and Advocacy for Institutional Change**

Progressive teachers are critical practitioners who expose and provoke barriers to genuine learning. Here, a participant admits such obstacles as insufficiency on MMC such as no language lab where students can learn communications, but he is still active. He stated, "I would recommend the campus to install a language lab as an urgent matter... I am willing to utilize but I need the resources" (T. Sapkota, personal communication, December 8, 2025). This motif reinforces a gradual demand of systemic change that considers the individual practices as incomplete without facilitating arrangements. The concept of progressive pedagogy requires a structural assistance otherwise its ideals remain unrealised.

Yet another participant explained the pragmatic obstacles which he encountered in the course of his teaching: "There are a lot of students in compulsory subjects. The classrooms have not all the necessary space. Time management in workshop model classes is really difficult. There are not enough technical devices in order to embrace all the classes" (P. Dhakal, personal communication, December 7, 2025). The absence of collaboration and integrative technology, e.g., using PPT as

a universal resource is prevented by large classes and scarcity of resources which echo the warnings of Dewey on environmental limitations of the educative experiences. However, this remark of Dhakal is an indication of advocacy to come, as it calls out institutional change such as improved facilities to continue with the change. According to M. Rizal (personal communication, December 5, 2025), "Student-centered method is time consuming.... not all the students equally... some of the students enjoy it... most of the students... avoid participation... they become absent... and do not complete the tasks." Progressive practices require scaffolding amongst different learners, though institutional obstacles such as a large class or cultural practices may contribute to inequities. This theme highlights why adaptive strategies like differentiated grouping are necessary to fulfil the vision of inclusive and equitable learning conditions as proposed by Dewey.

### **DISCUSSION**

The results of the interviews with Sapkota, Regmi, Dhakal, Rizal, and Roka indicate a strong shift from an authoritative lecturing style to the facilitative functions. In this process, teachers focus on making students proactive by using assignments such as presentations, fieldwork, and the ESA (Engage-Study-Activate) process. The fact that Sapkota focuses on replacing by keeping students silent approach with the 10% remembrance of teachers against the more than 60% of active engagement is a direct reflection of Dewey's (1938) inquiry-based learning, and students are free to build knowledge and not forced to passively take it in. This is consistent with Gelal (2024) who characterizes the use of critical pedagogy university teachers in Nepal through discussions and presentations to establish autonomy and Sharma (2023), who observes whole-

school movements to mentoring in activity-oriented settings. Nevertheless, their findings are not as deep: In the case of Gelal (2024), surface-level adoption is criticized because of the overcrowding, but in this instance, participants are showing traces of internalized transformation, e.g., the ESA sequence of Rizal. This sequence elicits curiosity through learning by doing or the connection of curricula to the current life experiences of students as Roka mentioned, which expands on the use of Deweyan cycles in South Asia by Rahman (2025). The models of workshop preparations conducted by Sapkota, group preparations and feedback loops, student-selected PowerPoint presentations as stated by Dhakal, and the parameter guidelines in peer interaction as said by Roka and extracurricular in support of unique talents as reported by Regmi illustrate the experiential learning as social problem-solving. These produced good answers in comparison with the ones produced by the teacher. This is reminiscent of Dewey (as cited in Rahman, 2025) community of learners, which intersects with Gelal (2024) in Nepali schools' project work on new knowledge and Sharma (2023) in team-building exhibits. One such difference is that the results focus on intrinsic motivation through topic choice in higher education, which Gelal (2024) has found to have less flexibility in an academic environment and that higher adaptability in semi-urban settings such as Myagdi.

The whiteboard on which Sapkota records each idea even those who are shy and the positive feedback that Rizal provides to the students regarding many of their strengths, e.g., speaking, reading, etc. operationalize democratic equity. The targeted questioning of Regmi in the otherwise noisy setting does not disrupt the student-centered flow in the classroom although it is authoritarian. These practices implement Dewey's (1938)

community of inquiry, which is consistent with critical pedagogy of Gelal (2024) to reach mutual decisions and Sharma's (2023) stakeholder meetings to have a voice. The differences arise in the focus of the findings on such psychological barriers as shyness, which is not as excessive as Gelal (2024) views it; therefore, emotional inclusion should be emphasized in Nepali higher education.

The translation of foreign texts to Nepali realities by Sapkota e.g. the comparison of values, the lessons about the mind, teenagers with mental issues by Regmi, and the use of the life in health applications by Dhakal make the abstract text a means of emancipation and hence resilience. This reflects the Dewey rooted education of ethical citizens (1916), which relates with the Communicative English Language Teaching (CELT) of Adhikari (2024) through the role-plays and Gelal (2024) through the lived-experience assignments. Another distinctive input is the socio-emotional richness of findings, which deals with the value conflicts, and enlarges the pragmatic approach of Hamillaz (2022) and the participatory instruments of Sharma (2023) such as SWOC (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges) analysis (Rahman, 2025).

The transition to multifaceted assessment, Sapkota's questions of every day and the homework based on the context, Dhakal's projects accompanied by feedback, Regmi's contribution to the discussion, Bishnu's informal evaluation, and Rizal's observing behaviour place the assessment as a dialogic development, rather than as a recall. This criticizes the standardized testing issues by Dewey (1916) in line with the Assessment for Learning (AFL) by Black and Wiliam (2009) and authentic assessments by Darling-Hammond et al. (2020). The results are expansive of Vygotsky (1978) scaffolding in honouring social-emotional capabilities on the importance of the

process over the product of Nepali settings.

The fact that Sapkota sometimes used PowerPoint and the student-made slides by Dhakal remind about the potential of inquiry with the use of technology, but regretting the lack of smart boards compels lecturing, which predetermines the traditionalism. This overlaps the TPACK model by Mishra and Koehler (2006) which sees tech as a student-centered facilitator and the structural barriers by Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2010), which take a form of the structural barriers. Divergences rejuvenate the belief predictors of Hermans et al. (2008) to show the second-order inequities where progressive ideals are sacrificed on infrastructure, as they transfer agency unique to low-resource environments with limited tools.

According to Freire (2018), dialogical rejection of banking models and care ethics as proposed by Noddings (2013), Regmi and Rizal establish trust by turning informal and personal, sharing strengths and experiences, respectively, and Roka by being closer to students through experiences, which is humanistic. This builds on the relational motivation relationships of Quin (2017), and the support of the findings by the affective scaffolding, which develops Deweyan experientialism through the lenses of Bergin and Bergin (2018) and Postholm (2021).

The criticisms of labs, class sizes, and time by Sapkota and Dhakal are the reminiscent of Vossoughi et al. (2020) determinants in underprivileged settings and Schweisfurth (2013) Deweyan environmental restrictions in South Asia. However, the results of the study are quite unique in describing the concept of advocacy, e.g., lab suggestions as pragmatic activism contrary to Kraft et al. (2021) emphasis on inhibition to highlight critique in the Nepali culture.

To sum up, the results emphasize a gradual but meaningful transformation in teaching practices at Nepali HEIs including MMC, where educators are increasingly embracing facilitative roles, experiential learning, and holistic assessment. While the systemic barriers such as overcrowded classrooms, limited technological resources, and institutional inertia remain the significant challenges, the commitment of these teachers to contextualized, democratic, and relational pedagogy reflects a strong advocacy for a progressive change. Their practices not only relate with global educational philosophies but also adapt them to local realities, thereby contributing to the development of critical, resilient and socially responsible learners. This study, thus, highlights the potential of progressive pedagogy to foster both academic growth and social empowerment, provided that institutional support and structural reforms accompany individual efforts.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, this study clarifies the dynamic and difficult terrain of progressive pedagogy at MMC and confirms its capability of producing critical and ethically engaged citizens under the conditions of neoliberalism and lack of resources in the field of higher education in Nepal. University teachers' accounts of thematic experiences show strong adaptations of Deweyan principles: through facilitator functions, workshop participation, democratic inclusiveness, contextualization of learning with real-life relevance, formative evaluation, personal relationships, and agency bring increased student motivation, retention, active vs. passive learning, and agency. But the ubiquitous obstacles such as crowded classrooms, lack of infrastructure such as language laboratories, and cultural shyness expose a Deweyan paradox. Ideals of experience cannot thrive without enabling

ecologies and worsen the inequity of participation and achievement. In practice, the results require the leaders of HEIs to focus on scalable interventions, i.e. equity audits of resource allocation, educator-based advocacy training, and hybrid approaches that can combine ESA sequences with community connections to overcome urban-rural boundaries. In theory, they add to the literature by combining Freirean dialogue and South Asian critiques in support of syncretic progressivism that is resistant to insecurity. Future studies must use mixed-method and longitudinal designs in multi-campus networks, which measure effects on various learners and experiment with policy levers such as the NEP-inspired reforms. Finally, the integration of progressive pedagogy does not only result in simple knowledge delivery but in democratic change, as the graduates will be able to face automation, climate change, and social disintegration with wisdom and solidarity.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

*The author declares no conflict of interest. This research was conducted independently without financial, political, or personal relationships that could inappropriately influence the study's findings or interpretations.*

#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

*I declare that this manuscript is my original work.*

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