Exploring the Socio-Cultural Dynamics of the Students in the Rural English Language Classrooms

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Abstract

Being specific to socio-cultural dynamics, this study aims to explore and analyse the dynamics of students and interpret them in the context of remote school-level English language classrooms in Nepal. For this qualitative study, the research process was guided by narrative inquiry, and five secondary-level students (three males and two females) were selected as participants using a purposive sampling technique. As per the purpose, the information was drawn through in-depth interviews and personal conversations with the participants, followed by quality and ethical standards - authenticity, reflexivity, rapport building, privacy and anonymity of the participants and uttered narratives. As a result, the narratives were thematised based on the identical perceptions and experiences. The finding shows that the classroom dynamics of the students in language classrooms are significantly influenced by socio-cultural dynamics – poor family and educational background, community and parental misconceptions, power imbalance, etc. As a result, such students experience language anxiety and shyness and perform silent behaviours, poor interaction, demotivation and disconnectedness in the classrooms. Being specific, this study may be meaningful to the students, language teachers, authors, policy makers, etc. Finally, being socio-cultural dynamics as a key determinant of classroom dynamics, it needs to be well-explored through different perspectives to expand its scope.

Keywords: Classroom dynamics, socio-cultural dynamics, language anxiety, family background and misconceptions

Introduction

In today's globalised world, the English language becomes a crucial means for communication, education and socio-economic advancement (Peng, 2024). It also helps in preserving local diversity and promoting intercultural communication among people from various disciplines. Therefore, it is predicted that the English language has a global scope, along with the benefits to the learners from urban, suburban, to rural settings. Whatever the difference in contexts, a classroom is considered the main platform of English language teaching and learning.

English language classrooms may be unique and quite different with comparison to the general classrooms due to the variation of classroom dynamics. The term classroom dynamics comprises the environment as a whole environment under which different aspects like classroom arrangement and management, grouping of the students, both students' and teachers' behaviours, interaction, relationship to each other, de-/motivation, rapport building, etc. are well considered (Dornyei & Tim, 2003). Such a dynamics may be more complex and specialised where the English language is taught/learned as a foreign language, like in Nepal. In such classrooms, the diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, behaviours, attitudes and interests of both students and teachers (Bohara, 2018), along with the complex nature of the English language, may influence them quite diversely.

Since the students originate from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, their perception, orientation and ways of behaving may be obviously different in the classrooms. Students' personalities that they inherently possess may also impact the classroom dynamics (Douglas, 2014). Due to so, the personality variation ranges from introvert to extrovert and shares quite closely with frankness and openness (Thach, 2025). Sometimes, the classroom dynamics may affect language anxiety and interaction as well; as a result, some of the students cannot engage in the classroom well. To minimise anxiety and maximise interaction with peers and students, the language teachers should create a supportive, caring and funny environment in the classrooms (Turula, 2010). However, such a positive environment may only be possible in case the language teachers are highly motivated and devoted to understanding and managing the classroom dynamics well.

With this study, I endeavoured to explore the socio-cultural dynamics of the English language classrooms and the participation culture of the students who represented the diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Similarly, it was intended to understand the challenges faced by the teachers in managing such classrooms. This study was conducted under the qualitative approach by applying narrative inquiry as a research design. As per the purpose of the study, it is hoped that it would be meaningful to explore and understand the socio-cultural dynamics of English language classrooms, and be helpful to

the teachers, students and other stakeholders of the socio-cultural dynamics in general.

Literature Review

Dynamics of the English language classroom can be measured in classroom culture, context, interactions, relationships and so on (Hadfield, 2000). Such a dynamics may be quite common in every English language classroom; however, it may be pretty specific and different from one classroom to another. The classroom-specific dynamics may depend on both the students' and teachers' socio-cultural backgrounds, which they represent obviously. Both culture and society are inseparable, whereas the former can be considered as the values, beliefs, rules and behavioural conventions that are prevalent in the society (Johnson, 2008). As such, the students may reflect the same in the classrooms, and teachers try to manage and facilitate their instruction accordingly.

Due to the socio-cultural backgrounds, all the individuals are different; therefore, the diversity of the classrooms is ensured. In such classrooms, the language teachers should treat the students as members of the classroom community and feel safe, motivated and treated equally (Cangelosi, 2014), along with the positive and cohesive nurturing (Hadfield, 2000). Moreover, the language classroom can be considered as a social environment that tends to shape the learning experiences with the help of teachers and a peer support system (Closa & Sarmiento, 2023). Therefore, for the students' academic and social development, there needs supportive environment, a shared culture and frequent interactions on behalf of teachers and peers in the English language classroom.

As well known, the diversity of the English language classroom is well familiar and prevalent everywhere. To mitigate the classroom diversity, whatever in forms, Michael Byram's INCA framework points out the three levels of intercultural competences: Basic, Intermediate and Full (Swallow, 2020). The basic level predicts the tolerance and gradual adaptation to the cultural differences; whereas, the intermediate one assumes the acceptance of values and norms of classroom culture without any challenges. The full level ensures the proper addressing and treatment of cultural diversity in the classroom. Surely, for managing the classroom diversity and behaviours of the students, the language teachers should be aware of the classroom reality and manage the same accordingly (Leaman, 2009). In the words of Herrera (2023), recognising cultural diversity allows for applying the culturally responsive teaching strategies in the classroom.

In a qualitative study, conducted by (Ozfidan et al., 2014), it was found that socio-cultural dynamics of English language classroom influence peer interaction, self-efficacy, and private speech in the remote settings. According to this study, if the teaching/learning activities of English language classrooms are conducted by incorporating the socio-cultural aspects of the students, it is sure to enhance motivation, engagement, and long-

term language retention. Similarly, an another study conducted by Tomak (2021) at the university-level found that socio-cultural aspects might influence the English language learning through scaffoldings and peer cooperation. So far, this study was coined through the dynamics of socio-cultural theory and mainly focused on the social context of the language classrooms. However, with comparison to both of these studies and some others that were in my access, this study seemed significantly different since it was conducted in a completely remote setting by exploring the lived experiences of the students.

Research Methodology

For this qualitative study, I applied Narrative Inquiry as a research design, thinking that it might help to record the human experiences through the construction and reconstruction of personal stories with respect to their culture and temporal motion (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Mostly, the narratives might be personal and social and take place in a certain context and given culture. To generate meaning, the researcher used interpretivism as a research paradigm. With this, he thought of exploring the individual's perceptions, sharing meaning and developing insights (Bryman, 2008). Since the researcher represented as a teacher in the rural classroom, he might act as an insider sometimes to generate information and their interpretation.

For the study, he selected 5 secondary level students, including 3 males and 2 females, from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds purposively. Considering in-depth interview would be helpful to generate in-depth information from the participants, the researcher used it for this narrative research (deMarrais, 2004). Like other qualitative designs, narrative inquiry required a completely engaged process of information collection and became busy to explore and generate the narratives of the participants thoroughly (Kramp, 2004). Similarly, to make the study more qualitative, he worked out more rigorously and reflected on the information without violating the ethicality of the study as well.

As per the understanding between the researcher and participants, their identities and narratives were kept anonymous throughout this study. Really, it triggered them to express their experiences without any hesitation. Similarly, as per the dynamics of narrative inquiry as the research method, the researcher engaged in-depth for analysis and interpretation of information (narratives). Furthermore, while constructing stories and evolving meaning through them, he delved deeply into their contexts, narratives and other symbolic gestures. Additionally, the researcher's reflection, being an insider and outsider, on all of them made more narrative, qualitative and meaningful.

Results and Discussion

For this study, the information was collected and analysed narratively through the participants' experience-based narratives. Here, the narratives, which were identical

in form and functioning, were blended in story-like forms. Later on, all of them were interpreted by linking the authentic and relevant literature.

Poor Family Background: Poorer the Upbringing in English

Students' family background may directly or indirectly be reflected in the form of classroom culture. Due to family poverty and educational status, they face problems like under-resourced and poor guardianship for their schooling. About the same, I inquired with the participants and received their experiential narrative as:

Arun, Gopal, Hari, Sita and Rita were friends and students at the same school in remote Bajhang. Arun, Hari and Rita came from poor family backgrounds, where their parents were illiterate and engaged in traditional farming. Their parents' daily chores could provide nothing more than simple living for the family. Due to their illiteracy, the parents were unable to offer proper guidance to help their children's education. They often urged their children to 'read and read' but did not know how to guide them effectively. In return, all of them laughed and tried to deceive their parents alike. To them, literacy in the English language was like 'black letters are equal to a buffalo'. Then, could they guide the children? Not, and all of them experienced the same.

Their family's poverty left them under-resourced and kept them far from exposure. As Arun's English language teacher asked questions, he mostly bowed his head down and pretended to be overtly. So did Hari and Rita as Arun in the classroom. As a result, all of them hardly passed in English language exam. Gopal and Sita's family background was quite comfortable for their living and education. Their fathers' literacy bestowed them a good guardianship and timely visit to the school administration. As a result, they seemed fully attentive both at home and at school. As they said, they always had their heads up when any questions were asked of them in the classroom.

With this narrative, it is acknowledged that both the economic and educational background of the family might influence their school children's language learning environment, both at home and at school. If the parents are well-educated, they can support their children to nurture with linguistic background and accomplish their homework properly; as a result, definitely, they will be motivated to engage in the English language classrooms (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Similarly, such parents can actively be involved in favourable guardianship at home and regularly communicate with the teachers to be familiar with their children's performance at school too. However, such

a dynamic is poorly practicable in rural settings since most of the parents are uneducated and with poor family backgrounds.

Like the majority of participants above, the family poverty and illiteracy of parents not only prevent the children from affording educational resources like books, notebooks, tutoring and language exposure (Hoff, 2003), but also from good guardianship. Actually, due to under-resourced and a lack of needy guardianship, the students might feel disconnected and unprepared in the language classrooms; as a result, such students might suffer from withdrawal behaviours – lowering their heads while asking questions, feeling isolated, dropping out of schools and so on.

Socio-Cultural Beliefs as a Misfortune

Like all the students, the participants of this study also originate from the community, along with the prevalent socio-cultural beliefs, which may be acceptable or unacceptable in modern society. Being specific to the purpose of this study, the researcher endeavoured to explore such beliefs and their side effects on English language learning in the remote classroom. Here, a brief narrative of the participants is given:

> All over my community, it was the cultural belief that upbringing with the English language would be quite uncommon for the rural children. Parents often echoed the same as English, like tough subjects are only for urban kids," Hari explained. Due to such societal hearsay, he usually got frightened and demotivated in his classroom. Like Hari, Arun and Rita experienced a self-doubt, anxiety and out-of-belongingness both in the classrooms and outside. As a result, neither they could interact with the teachers nor with the peers in the classrooms. Such a traditional belief was seen as a misfortune and pushed them back frequently.

From this narrative, it is understood that the socio-cultural beliefs of the community and parents are automatically transferred to children. Actually, due to the common perception, English is certainly difficult for the remote children, and they experienced and reflected the same during their schooling as well. One thing, such misconceptions may evolve language anxiety in children; as a result, they experience helplessness, low self-esteem, and fear of making mistakes in front of their peers and teachers. Sometimes, the language anxiety may be inherited across family members as well. According to Crystal (2003), in many rural communities, the English language is often viewed as an elite language and specific to urban privilege. Such hearsay may also influence internalising stereotype threats to the remote children and demotivate them from learning the English language. Similarly, the school children may consider their parents' misconceptions as warnings, like 'English language is usually tough for the remote children'. Due to such beliefs, the children get mixed mindsets and reduce

their aspiration for learning language (Dweck, 2006). Here, it is supposed that socio-cultural misconceptions can trigger the school children toward negativity. Therefore, such misconceptions need to be reformed from the community, schools and mindsets of the community people and children as well.

The repeated experiences of academic setbacks and social isolation led these students to develop coping strategies rooted in withdrawal and silence rather than active engagement. This cycle of internalized inferiority and external marginalization not only impeded language acquisition but also affected their broader social identity formation, fostering a sense of 'otherness' that extended beyond educational contexts. Addressing these deeply embedded socio-cultural misconceptions is crucial for educators and policymakers seeking to create equitable learning environments that empower rural learners. Cultivating inclusive classroom practices that validate diverse cultural backgrounds and dismantle harmful stereotypes can help break this cycle, enhancing students' motivation, participation and ultimately their language learning outcomes.

There, it is well-narrated how socio-cultural beliefs negatively impact rural children's learning experiences, particularly in learning the English language. The consequences of such socio-cultural misconceptions extend beyond academic performance; they impact learners' identity formation, sense of belonging, and overall well-being. Therefore, dismantling these pervasive myths requires a multifaceted approach involving community engagement, teacher training, and curriculum reform. Schools must actively work to create inclusive environments that challenge stereotype threats and promote growth mindsets among students. Parallel efforts should be directed at community awareness programs that encourage supportive attitudes toward English language learning and recognize the value of linguistic diversity as an asset rather than a barrier.

In summary, socio-cultural misconceptions represent a critical barrier to equitable education in rural contexts and must be addressed systematically to empower learners. By transforming community narratives and educational practices, it is possible to foster more positive, confident, and motivated language learners prepared to engage successfully in an increasingly globalized world.

Lesser the Interaction: Better the Classroom

To understand the dynamics of interaction, the researcher inquired with the participants about how their socio-cultural dynamics influence the interaction in the remote English language classrooms. On this basis, a brief narrative is portrayed here:

I am ever habituated to head down and remain silent in the classroom after my

mind is immersed in a societal belief 'better not to utter directly with any senior',"

Sita explained. Agreeing with Sita, Arun, and Gopal added that to be silent refers

to being obedient and disciplined in the classroom. In case they speak out without their teacher's permission, they will be misjudged and observed as disrespectful by their peers and teachers, too.

These narrative sketches a common social and cultural dynamic of a language classroom in a rural setting, where silence is considered a symbol of respect and obedience toward teachers, and speaking out without permission, a violation of classroom norms. It is thought that school children are social agents and carry their community-based socio-cultural dynamics into the classrooms to harmonise their habituation in some rural settings (Li, 2007). Similarly, the power dynamics, like the roles of teachers (Jones and Zeichner, 2012) and peers at front benches, may often discourage and demotivate those students who prefer being less interactive in the language classrooms. Such a dynamic may undermine the necessity of interaction and participatory learning as mentioned by Vygotsky (1978) and Freire (1970). Therefore, the misconceptions that are prevalent in rural settings about classroom dynamics need to be reformed and redefined in the language classrooms.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant impact of socio-cultural dynamics on English language learning in rural classrooms. The findings underscore that deep-rooted cultural beliefs and societal perceptions—such as the notion that English is a subject suited only for urban students create psychological barriers like anxiety, self-doubt, and a sense of exclusion among rural learners. These factors hinder effective interaction with peers and teachers, limiting students' engagement and participation in the classroom. Additionally, the limited educational and economic backgrounds of families in rural settings contribute to the lack of supportive guardianship and academic encouragement at home. Therefore, addressing these socio-cultural challenges is crucial for fostering a more inclusive, supportive, and motivating learning environment. Language teachers, stakeholders, and policymakers must recognize and integrate the socio-cultural realities of rural students into pedagogical practices to enhance motivation, interaction, and overall language acquisition. Ultimately, promoting culturally responsive teaching and creating positive classroom dynamics can empower rural learners, helping to bridge the educational divide between rural and urban contexts.

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