

Research Article

**Exploring Teacher Traits in Classroom Practices**

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**Abstract**

*Teachers play a key role to proliferate the educational system as they are at the implementation level of educational acts, rules and regulations. Their traits are at a flux because of temporal and contextual variations encountered in different settings. This context led this study to explore teacher traits in real classroom practices. To achieve this goal, phenomenological research design, as a type of qualitative inquiry, has been adopted. The population of the study comprised the stakeholders of Bachelor of Mountain Tourism Management (BMTM) programme conducted in Janapriya Multiple Campus, Pokhara. The tool for collecting information was non-participant class observation, in which three classes were observed. The results of the study reveal that teacher traits can be measured by triad roles like professional, administrative, and social dimensions. The study implies that teachers should be aware of these triad roles; and the current pedagogical trends and practices.*

**Keywords:** Administrative, professional, social, teacher traits

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**Introduction**

Teachers need to play varying roles and demonstrate distinctive traits based on the contexts they encounter. Their prime roles can be illustrated in authoritative-democratic cline. Teachers, as authorities, play a role of autocrats and commanders of the class who dictate whatever the learners need to do. This is a context of a teacher-fronted classroom (Rose & Kasper, 2010), in which only teachers take agency whereas learners are only the followers. Such a situation appears in traditional classes because it is an easy way to lead the learners towards wherever teachers wish the learners to be and to go. The next type of leadership role, as opposed to the autocratic one, is democratic, in which both the teachers and the learners share some leadership where necessary.

Teachers are different due to the variability in their personalities such as field dependent versus field independent, extrovert versus introvert, risk taking versus risk-avoiding, along

with aptitude, attitude, motivation, affective factors, and so on (Gass & Selinker, 2009; Saville-Troike, 2010; & Gass, Behney, & Plonsky, 2013). These variables are the parameters to identify personality traits of the teachers, whose roles are dependent on different contexts inside and outside the classroom. Despite their different personalities, teachers should be flexible enough to tackle with the “magic moments” (Harmer, 2008a, pp. 24 & 157) decisively and instantly. For example, when the learners have been developed into “praise junkies” (Harmer, 2008a, p. 27), they may be out of track and the teacher needs to perform the role of a controller. Likewise, teachers are not only individual professionals inside the classroom but also members of the communities. Hence, they need to play the role of the agents for social change. Accordingly, they need to perform administrative, professional, and social roles. Such a discursive ability is a pre-requisite to be a professional teacher. Based on these contexts, this study aimed to explore the teacher traits in classroom practices.

Teacher traits subsume: controller, prompter, participant, resource, tutor, rapport builder, task doer, manager and knowledge builder/holder, as the variables to explore and settle (Nagaraj, 1997; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Richards & Rodgers 2003; Larsen-Freeman, 2007; Tickoo, 2007; Harmer, 2008a & b; Farrell & Jacobs, 2010; Neupane, 2016; & Assaf, n. d.). Furthermore, Fumin and Li (2012) conducted a study on extensive sample and found out teachers’ crucial roles in fostering students’ autonomous learning ability in terms of four variables such as study guides, classroom organizers, resource facilitators, and learning regulators. In learner autonomy, thus, teachers’ role does not decline. These teacher traits fall under the parameters of professional, administrative, and social domains (Figure 1).

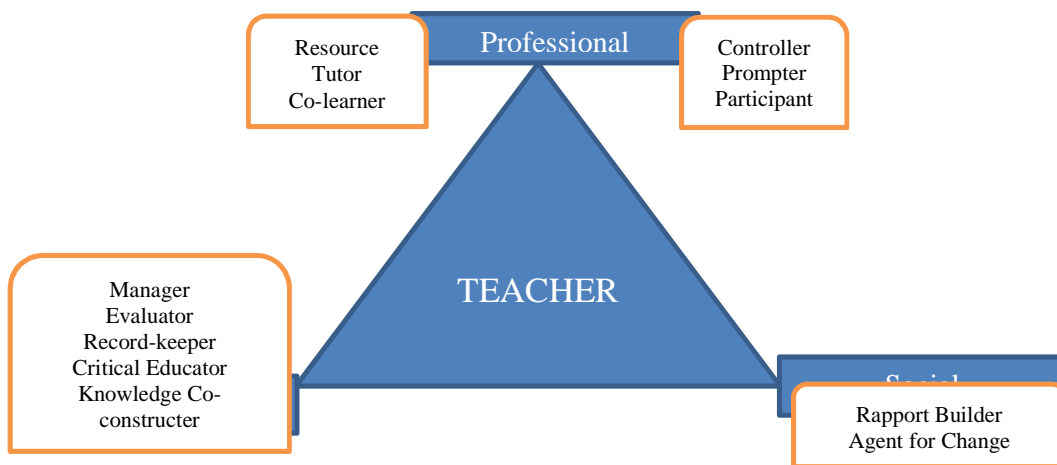


Figure 1. PAS Model for the Study

### **Professional Roles**

Professional roles reflect teacher traits in varying teaching learning contexts in which they need to change their roles and tasks. For example, when the students display abrupt behaviours, teachers need to be controllers and when the learners are passive; the teachers should go with the former as co-learners.

Teachers as controllers (Tickoo, 2007) are classroom-in-charges, who deliver lectures in the teacher- fronted classroom (Rose & Kasper, 2010), maintain order and hold authority of the activities conducted in the classroom. They are guides and the learners follow them. Secondly, teachers as prompters (or facilitators) play the roles of the catalysts but being involved in the task. They provide feedback for encouraging the learners may be in fluency or role play activity. Therefore, teachers provide scaffolding (Mitchell & Myles, 2004) for the learners. Yet, teachers should be neither too much adamant nor too much indifferent, nor merely an observant. Thirdly, teachers can be participants along with the learners because it is encouraging for the latter. So, as participants, teachers can be role models for the learners in communicative activities, which can encompass culturally relevant issues, too. At this conjecture, it is customary to note that teachers can be learning from the diverse group of learners and hence the former can be “co-learners” (Farrell & Jacobs, 2010, p. 112). The fourth role, different from the third, is that teachers are resources for the learners and hence the former are required to be resourceful and knowledgeable. Teachers should not make the learners parasites that are reliant on others, but should make bees that look for nectar themselves after having information about where the flower garden lies. The summation of a prompter and a resource yields the teacher roles as tutors (also advisors, counselors, consultants). Teachers, as tutors, facilitate backward learners may be from differently abled one or from marginalized, minority, downtrodden, frustrated, or lower class groups. However, this is possible only if the class size is manageable.

### **Social Roles**

The roles explicated above are not sufficient for the big picture of the good teachers, who should maintain harmonious relationship with the learners. Teachers, as rapport builders (Harmer, 2008a), should play the roles not only inside the constraints of school premises but also outside it to the society. It is because learners are not only individual beings present in

the class but also members of the communities outside. Therefore, different types of diversities (e.g. linguistic, cultural, creative, ethnic, and economic) are realities of the postmodern classrooms.

Teachers are also taken as agents for social change (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) and are responsible to be sensible and sensitive enough to make the learners feel that educational institutions are real places for their betterment. Harmer (2008a & b) have suggested two main ways for building good rapport with the learners in the classroom: (a) recognizing, listening, and respecting them; and (b) being even-handed. Nevertheless, teachers should not be too critical; neither can they be too admirer that makes the learners “praise junkies” (Harmer, 2008a, p. 27). Beyond these ways to deal with diverse students inside the classroom, the teachers should be capable of building rapport to the learners as community members.

### **Administrative Roles**

Teachers as administrators should keep diaries (journals), and records of their learners. They can do this by keeping anecdotes, rating scales, cumulative records, diaries and the like. They can also keep records of evaluation scores, maybe for the sake of self-judgment and for the conduction of remedial teaching.

Further, teachers are managers and knowledge holders and builders. They should manage learners in the classroom and hold the spirit of teacher ideals. Also, teachers should be ready for constructing knowledge from diverse group of learners as post-modern classrooms are miniatures of multilingual and multicultural societies. For example, a teacher from one ethnic group can learn cultures from multicultural group of learners. In this sense, teachers are “co-constructors of knowledge” (Assaf, n. d., p.5) and hence, they should be “critical educators” (Assaf, n. d., p. 8), who is capable of reviewing or commenting the existing education system and developing learners to be so. These are the distinctive traits of postmodern teachers.

### **Data and Methods**

Based on the nature of problem, context of the study and purpose of the research, designs are set. Judging these criteria, this study adopted phenomenological research design, which calls for interpretivists’ paradigm (Leavy, 2017). I took teacher traits as a phenomenon to investigate into the real classroom practices in which teachers performed their roles.

I purposively selected only three classes as it was not possible to include all in this small scale study and a few informants for in-depth investigation were sampled purposively in qualitative research (Flick, 2009, & Creswell, 2012 & 2014). Furthermore, Giorgi (2008) has put these words, “At least three participants are included because a sufficient number of variations are needed in order to come up with a typical essence” (as cited in Finlay, 2009, p. 9). Therefore, I selected three teachers and their classes at Bachelor of Mountain Tourism Management Programme of Janapriya Multiple Campus that is located in the Pokhara metropolitan city.

I planned to be a “nonparticipant observer” and the mode was “unstructured” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 179), in which “the researcher observes the participants in the setting without engaging in the same activities” (Leavy, 2017, p. 135). Thus, I had not prepared any observational schedule/protocol, either. While observing the classes, I maintained field notes, which are “the written or recorded notes on your observations in the field” (Leavy, 2017, p. 136). I jotted down typical words and phrases in the form of on-the-fly notes and thick descriptions so that I could use them in analysis phase. Thus, I also kept a diary while observing their classes. For information processing, I used codes for the three observed classes as CO1, CO2, and CO3 respectively to maintain anonymity and to present, analyze, and interpret the information conveniently and comprehensively.

## **Results and Discussion**

I observed three classes being a non-participant observer so that the natural data could be collected. Each class lasted for one hour. I observed first and third semester classes because only these classes were being run at the time of data collection. The results of the observation have been presented and analyzed in the succeeding sections.

### **First Class Observation (CO1)**

The teacher (T1) began his class asking a few students about the reasons for their absence the previous day in this format:

T: Why were you absent yesterday?

S: I was busy at homework. Sorry sir. (*Source: Field note*)

This vignette shows that the teacher is trying to regularize the students in the class and to establish good relation with his fellow students. This is an episode of a rapport builder on the part of a teacher. Then, he revised the lesson he had taught the day before. It was followed by

his mini-lecture that comprised a format of the parts of a letter like introduction, discussion, and conclusion. In this way, he became a guide and a good resource for the students. At the meantime, he also responded the students' queries and directed them to read the model letter from the book assigned to them. For this episode, he exhibited the role of a director or a prompter.

After a short interaction with the students, he asked them to write a letter based on the prompt given to them. He initiated the tasks giving suggestions in case they needed. For this point, he played the role of a facilitator and a keen observer of the students' task. Further, as an instructor, he was instructing them frequently as per the situation. While the students were writing their letters, he was walking around the class checking their activities and advising them individually as a tutor, too.

As soon as the students submitted their works, he checked them and wherever necessary he suggested for further improvements. This is an instance of being an evaluator, a judge or an assessor. He also proved to be a guide or a pathfinder in these words:

Don't make an exact copy of this. Don't claim you're the best one. Be polite. Show your interest only. That's necessary. Show your gratefulness and say that you enjoyed the interview. Second one is to discuss. Refer to some of the points. Just say, "I'm interested in this job". Just say, "I've special skill". Don't copy the words/lines from the sample given. (Source: Field note)

The vignette exhibits that the teacher is a good instructor, who can bring the students in the right track. He is also a good leader who could lead the students towards the right path. Furthermore, when he finished his instructions to the class in general, the students began rewriting the letters. Then, he supported some students in person. This is an instance of being a coach to every student. While he was acutely observing their writing, he was emphasizing on originality in this way, "Write in your own language".

Nevertheless, the students were confused. Then he said, "Write you address first, why you know, it's to show who's writing this letter. Then, give one space and then date, okay". This confirms him to be a classroom leader. Finally, he told them his plan for the next day gave them homework and wrapped his class up.

CO1 demonstrates that the teacher was rapport builder, controller, director, facilitator, keen observer, evaluator, guide, resource, or coach. Whatever roles he performed, the teaching was

teacher-centered each and every time. The students were observed as his followers. My observation in this context is that the teacher has not freed himself from the traditional teacher-centeredness of teaching and has not been accustomed to learner-centered practices that are the demands of present day pedagogy.

### **Second Class Observation (CO2)**

As compared to the CO1, I observed CO2 to be more teacher-centered and the teacher performed the roles of authority, resource, director and controller. These traditional teacher traits were added by the role of a record keeper, a planner, and for some extent rapport builder, too. As soon as the teacher entered the class, he began commanding the students in this way:

T: Have you done your task?

S: No, sir. We don't know.

T: You don't see properly... You...careless!

S: (Murmur)

T: (Speaking as an authority). Look at the board. (*Source: Field note*)

The teacher was talking boldly each time in an authoritative fashion. He began the solution on the board and explained explicitly. It was a deductive way of teaching. He explicated everything himself by giving references to his previous days' teaching. The students were just his followers. After about fifteen minutes' teaching, he started interacting with the students in this way:

T: Oh, Mr. Beard, Why didn't you come to the class yesterday?

S: (Indifferently) I stayed at home.

T: You read at home, then?

S: Yeah! (*Source: Field note*)

This discourse shows that the teacher is trying to build rapport to the students but differently. While he was teaching, a team of free students union (FSU) entered the class and the FSU chair roared, "Is it okay in the class?" The students replied, "So...so". This discourse is an indicative of the students' dissatisfaction with the campus activities. This also implies teachers' poor rapport with the students. FSU chair also shouted, "Is there no bolt from inside the door? If not, you (pointing to the teacher) should talk to the administration." This vignette

entails that FSU chair was trying to show his boldness and power to his colleagues. He behaved as if he were a big brother there. This might have happened because the teacher said to him, “Why are you here? To disturb the class?” And the chair responded negatively. Further, he didn’t respect the students as well but was always bullying them, maybe because he wanted to show his power on them. This episode shows that if the teachers are rude, students can naturally be so.

The teacher also seemed a resource for the students while he was solving the problems on the board interacting with them. However, the students were not responding well. This is evident from the following discourse:

T: What is mortgage?

S: (Murmuring) (*Source: Field note*)

This confirms that the teacher did not have good rapport with the students. Notwithstanding with this, when he kidded, they were laughing. This implies that his way of building rapport was different from the usual manner.

When the teacher was informing them that there would be no classes for two days, students were complaining about teachers’ irregularity. In addition, they complained for not having a fixed book, a prescribed textbook for BMTM programme. Ultimately, he took students’ attendance to keep records of presence.

Like CO1, CO2 shows teachers’ roles to be an authority and resource. Unlike the former, the latter shows additional roles like record keeper and planner. Like in CO1, CO2 teacher seemed to be fully teacher-centered and unknown about the learner-centeredness and unknown about the learner-centered and participatory teaching approaches which are requisites for the effective teaching learning.

### **Third Class Observation (CO3)**

Like in CO1 and CO2, I observed CO3 teacher to be leader, controller, guide, director, authority, and overall, fully teacher-centered. However, he performed roles of a record keeper for some extent; he was not observed following social and administrative roles like manager, evaluator, critical thinker, co-creator of knowledge, and so on. When the teacher entered the class, he installed the multimedia projector and gave a mini-lecture focusing on his



teaching item “The organization as an open system.” The students listened to him patiently and in a disciplined manner. This proves him a good controller, guide or authority.

While he was explaining his materials being projected, the students were trying to write whatever was projected. Some of them, I think, were not listening to him because they were writing in their copies. For me, the teacher should have told them that these points could be sent to them in their e-mail or messenger if possible; otherwise, he could provide them hand-outs for facilitation. He was totally teacher-centered but never learner-centered. Since he was self-centered, he was not supporting learner autonomy.

He also did not care for building rapport to the students. His teaching was like one-way traffic that does not show him a good rapport-builder. He did not give time to students to talk about the subject. Thus, at times, some students were side-talking. After about half-time of the period passed, the students began murmuring, I overheard. He could not catch the students’ mindset which demanded their agency in teaching-learning activities.

He was totally self-centered. Notwithstanding with this, he partially tried to activate learners. This is evident from his query to students to make groups (each group consisting of three members) for conducting group work for the accomplishment of a case study. He also asked the students to prepare slides for presenting their case study reports. Despite the teacher’s assignment, the students were complaining about not teaching how they could prepare slides. This is evident from this discourse:

T: How to make power points?

S: You should make, anyway. (*Source: Field note*)

Finally, as a record keeper, he took students’ attendance and closed his teaching that day.

The results of CO3 reveal that the teacher’s roles were limited only to a controller, and a record-keeper for some extent. These limited roles do not suffice him to be a good teacher.

The CO1, CO2, and CO3 exhibit the limited teacher roles like controller, facilitator, tutor, resource, rapport builder, record keeper, manager, planner, keen observer, tutor, coach, and evaluator. This proves that teachers are conscious to their professional roles but callous to administrative and social roles. This is undesirable in autonomous programme like BMTM.

The informants showed congruence in professional roles like controller, resource, facilitator, resource, and tutor. However, the incongruences were mainly in administrative and social roles. They kept only students' daily attendance in the name of record keeping. They were not observed keeping anecdotes, cumulative records, rating scales, and so on and so forth.

In spite of some paradoxes mentioned above, the study exhibits that triad roles and tasks (social, administrative and professional), on the part the teachers, are necessary to undertake for the learners' better results and the institutional prosperity.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The results of the study reveal that teachers' role is crucial for the proliferation of the autonomous programme specifically and of the campus generally. The primacy of teacher-centered practices to the learner-centered ones proves that the teachers are accustomed in traditional methods like lecture and they are not used to practicing participatory approaches like project work, pair work, discovery, problem solving and self-exploratory practices.

The results also show that the stakeholders are not aware of triad roles like professional, administrative and social ones. The teachers' performance in the classroom as controllers, for some extent facilitators, guides, and poor rapport builders confirms that they are not conscious about their roles to take and tasks to perform. To be specific, they are not much aware of their administrative and social responsibilities which are desirable to bear inside and outside the classrooms.

These conclusions have some implications. Firstly, the teachers should be provided refresher training to highlight the ways of implementing participatory and learner-centered practices against the teacher-centered traditions. They should be made aware of their tripartite roles (professional administrative and social) so that they can contribute to enhance the autonomous programme like BMTM. Secondly, such autonomous programmes should spark teacher autonomy as well as learner autonomy so that the concerned sectors may develop authority, responsibility, and accountability. This way of imparting agency to themselves is beneficial to hold up the spirit of professionalism in teachers and agency in students. In turn, this facilitates in proliferating the BMTM programme specifically and the campus generally. Thirdly, this study can be replicated to another study area, extended number of participants, other agendas of teacher professionalism, and by using other research designs, tools and techniques.

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