

# Student Identity in the EFL Classrooms

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## Abstract

This paper explores various processes of identity construction of the students studying in English medium secondary schools in Nepal while learning English as a second /foreign language. The students in English medium schools actively participate in various classroom interactions, engage mutually in the learning process and share their feelings through which they make sense of themselves and construct various identities. By collecting information from interviews with eight participants, this qualitative study showcases that the EFL students construct multiple identities through the process of positioning, opportunity and transformation. Due to positioning, i.e., how the students situate themselves through their discursive practices and how they are situated by others, the students construct a number of identities namely, discourse identity, social identity, institution identity, authored identity, affinity identity and L1 identity, becoming and being as identity, learner identity and inner circle identity. Some of these identities, especially the former ones are constructed by virtue of opportunity whereas the later one is constructed due to transformation. These identities, however, were not found going parallel because the identities constructed in one field infused their identities in other fields.

**Keywords:** *student identity, English medium positioning, opportunity, transformation,*

## Introduction

Identity is a social construct of ‘being’ co-constructed by ‘self’ and ‘others’ to explore how they see their life based on interactional practices. In the condition that SLA has not adequately addressed socially situated learning, identity hovers around locating central in the process of L2 learning (Norton & Mckenny, 2011). The students interlace between local culture and society and find their new existence into ‘being’ (Shields, 2015). While learning English, the teacher (re)tells the stories of personal experiences, the classroom as a learning

community thrives, the students as an agency (Martin & Daiute, 2013 as cited in Shields, 2015) mimic the teacher and the identity is constructed in the classroom through their learning community as mastering a tool (Weinstein, 2004). Therefore, identity is a reference to social situations to generate meaning.

According to Wenger (1998), identity is temporary, constructed in a social setting, constant in process, containing historical, present and future experiences of a person. This shapes a pattern of thinking, speaking, behaving, and interacting skills that is socially, culturally

and historically constructed. In English medium schools, the students do not autonomously construct their identities in a social, cultural and political vacuum; rather with socio-cultural and socio-political discourses. While participating in the class, they construct multiple identities in one or the other way either by being a member of groups (as their social identities) or having certain roles (role identities), or being the unique biological entities that they are (personal identities) and so on (Basnet, 2021). As a researcher, I studied the processes of identity construction of English medium secondary level students in the context of Nepal to gain an L2 self in their natural EFL setting. This study therefore looks into the processes of identity construction of those students in English medium secondary level English classrooms in Nepal.

As an English professional teaching English in private schools in Kathmandu Valley, I found my students having diverse abilities, skills, attitudes, and behaviours. Some of them were good orators, while others were good writers. Similarly, a few students were less than proactive, while some others were highly competitive. A few of them may also be termed as slow learners. In this way, they constructed distinct identities like ‘a good orator,’ ‘the School Head Boy,’ ‘a good writer,’ ‘the best speaker,’ ‘the slow learners’ among other. In this regard, I thought that students’ identity is ‘an issue’ (MacLure, 1993) found in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class while participating in different EFL activities (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). I believe that each learner constructs learner identity in L2 learning variously engaging in classroom interactions. The students who are good at study have second language (L2) identities (Block, 2007) and who are not competent enough are marginalized (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Each learner in the class is an active agent who constructs communicative identity in L2 learning. Learners, thus, may be situated

as subconsciously legitimate members (Wenger, 1998) or as incompetent members in the class (Toohey, 2000) in terms of how active agents they are in the classrooms.

It has been observed that the students of English medium secondary schools engage more in classroom interaction, role play, dialogues, English speech, story/ essay writing competition, elocution, extempore, spell bee contest etc., make their learning meaningful negotiating with those activities and construct multiple identities. Their negotiation can be silent (Wenger, 1998), however, they gradually learn new cultural and linguistic norms, and experience a process of identity construction throughout their language learning trajectory.

Student identity is a fundamental notion that originated from the interest in the individual’s subjective experience of being a learner. It looks at how the students understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how they understand possibilities for the future (Norton, 2013). In second/foreign language learning, students’ identity is how the students see themselves and how they enact their roles within different EFL settings depending on the activities they actively participate in self and group. At the onset of learning English, their new experience of learning English shapes individual learners and other members of the classroom community construct learner identity.

The identity of a student is constructed throughout life from both formal and informal experiences of becoming a student as a part of the worldwide community of professionals with shared goals, values, discourses and practices (Basnet, 2021). Therefore, this helps to establish a dynamic, changing and context-

dependent nature to link between the individual experience of the learner and the analysis of the learning environment. The students construct their identities by understanding themselves, their actions and their mind based on time and space. It is possible by negotiating experience, community membership, nexus of multi-membership and relationship between local and global. They form identity based on their works, social discourses, grades, communicative power, narratives etc. and create their existence in the classroom through mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998).

In Nepal, English medium schools are being restructured into more personalized environments by making their small English learning communities and offering possibilities for interactions. Such interactions construct learner identity. Block (2007) perceives learner identity as an encompassing process of being active participants in their classroom and showing their relationship among the members constitutive of and constituted by the social environment. The multiple identities are constructed through discourse (Gee, 2001) to thrive importance of discourse in identity formation or identity in discourse (Varghese et al, 2005) of the students who are taken as agentive beings to search for linguistic resources (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). By engaging with my participants for a considerable length of time, studying of relevant literatures and issues prompted to formulate the research question for this study 'How do EFL learners contribute to various processes of identity construction?'

## Review of Previous Studies

Student identity in L2 learning is found autonomous body of experiencing students' subjective experience. Different scholars carried

out research substantially in this area. For instance, Li (2014) focused on students' constant (re)construction of their multiple identities by situating them within their immediate and imagined learning communities. Similarly, Falsafi (2010) found student identity as an analytical tool and a symbolic artefact in the construction of meaning about oneself and the other as a learner. He found that the subjective experience of the learners and their extrinsic forces shape learner identity in the classroom. Likewise, Shin (2015) concluded that learners' experiences influenced their identity development and their identity shift influenced by multiple socio-cultural contexts. In a similar vein, Shields (2015) shed light on the impact of students' classroom learning process and their culture supported to construct student identity. Teng (2019) focused that student identity is historically and socially formed and influences EFL learning of the students participating in practiced and imagined communities. While constructing student identity in EFL classrooms, Fatmawati (2021) stressed that the students do not only construct identity in EFL classroom but also learn English cultures, beliefs and values. In Nepal, Skinner (1990) pinpointed traditional ethnic and cast identity, social identity, gender identity and distinct identity (one-way students characterize themselves and others in their social world is based on the basis of a traditional-modern continuum) in her study investigating children's identity construction in and around formal schooling. More importantly, there is almost no research that has explored on the processes of students' identity construction in the Nepalese EFL classroom. It is, therefore, important to explore how EFL students learning English in English medium secondary schools construct multiple identities in their classroom practices.

## Methodology

This qualitative research adopted an interpretive paradigm to explore students' identity by taking reference to the local classroom community and their live stories through narratives about everyday lives and their actions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In my study context, an EFL classroom of an English medium secondary school is a natural setting for learning with multiple realities of social constructions. The process of identity construction in L2 learning is viewed in relation to local, temporal and specific settings to examine the students' identity in their own Community of Practice (CoP). I chose interpretivism for perceiving and understanding the processes of identity construction in English medium secondary schools in Nepal (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). The identity of the students was explored through their narratives of experience which are culturally derived and historically situated (Blaxter et al., 2008). The meaning is generated from the subjective reference that is relational to time, space and context (Taylor, 2014) and the classroom cultures of students from English medium secondary schools in Nepal. This helped me to make meaning from students' narratives about how they constructed their second language identity from classroom participation and learning activities (Chen, Shek, & Bu, 2011). This interpreted classroom reality from multiple perspectives about their views, their background and experiences of EFL class (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2011). Furthermore, this helped to understand how students constructed identity through classroom interactions made in natural surroundings (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, Taylor, 2014) as social agents and members of particular groups. This made sense of the real classroom pedagogy of those students and their ascribed identity in real-life situations by approaching into the reality and (hi) stories beyond rigid and permanent identity. In this respect, the interpretive paradigm helped

me to document physical, social and cultural context carefully and shaped students' classroom interactions, thereby generating the context of dynamics of teaching and learning.

To explore student identity, I incorporated Wenger's (1998) Community of Practice (CoP) as a theoretical framework to view English language learning as a situated process comprising community, practice, meaning, and identity. The members of the community engage in joint activities and discussions, share information and build relationships to construct identity. Learning takes place within mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire through which they define and negotiate their identity based on their learning experiences and observations. As identity is a process of meaning-making, a process of negotiating meaning through continuous interaction, gradual achievement and give and take, this theory generates meaning through students' experience of how they perceive the world. Wenger (1998) states that "we make sense of ourselves and our actions through participation, engagement and interaction in the classroom community (p. 56)." As the students enter into learning CoP, they develop their identity through the negotiation of learning as learning trajectories. Each student in CoP finds his/her classroom as a unique place and gains a unique identity through engagement. They construct learner identity by interconnecting individual students with the classroom community and therefore claim that the focus of identity should be on the process of their social, cultural and historical perspectives. Membership in CoP transforms into identity as a form of learning competence. Thus, the learners in the classroom tags their identity as a learner constructed through overall activities.

I took narrative inquiry as a method to explore personal experiences, events and narratives of

English medium secondary level students to understand how they construct identities through their content and make meaning from their classroom activities. This helped to probe their both lived and told stories (Clandinin, 2006) about the English language learning situation and reveal multiplicity of selves. The narratives supported me to live with my students in the classroom and provide personal investments in language learning (Murphey & Carpenter, 2008) and meaningful aspects of learning from the perspectives of students themselves. This method delved into the inner world of English medium secondary level students to examine English learning experiences in their complexity and richness as “narratives arise from experience” (Menezes et. al., 2008, p. 225). This method supported probing personal and social growths (Clandinin & Conelley, 2000) of learning English, treating their narratives as socially situated interactive performances (Gee, 2001) and viewing their stories as a range of social resources and circumstances. It helped to enrich segments with narrative details, reported speech, appealed to the audience and paralinguistic features (Riessman, 2008). To look for the classroom activities of the students about their past, present and future doings/happenings as internalized and evolving life stories and explore their temporal, personal and social identity through their narratives, I adopted narrative inquiry as a method.

The participants of this research were eight students studying in classes IX and X in English medium secondary schools of Kathmandu and Lalitpur districts. I chose four English medium secondary schools (two from Kathmandu and two from Lalitpur) as a research site. I first took four participants choosing one from each school based on purposive sampling. I didn't find what I wanted to explore. I therefore added four more participants choosing one from each school as I was flexible in sample size. While selecting the

participants, I tried to make it more inclusive maintaining gender balance in both districts thinking that the words ‘male’ and ‘female’ themselves are the words tracing identity. Not to be biased in gender equality, I kept four boys and four girls in this study.

Student narratives were used as information-generating approach thinking that the student narratives were the real stories of the students studying in English medium secondary schools (grades IX and X) about their lived experiences of learning English. Some of the major ideas were noted down in a diary. The narrative interviews were taken after formulating different probing questions to match their background and introduction section. I probed various questions in student narratives starting from introducing questions, elaborative questions, focused questions, and follow-up and less probing questions to lead to the main theme and the sub-themes. The information generated from students' narratives was audio recorded using a high digital interface recording system. The participants were informed that the transcribed text of narratives would be given to them to verify their responses. The recorded audio narratives were transcribed exactly maintaining their clichés and simple grammar mistakes and then the transcribed texts were given to the participants to verify their audio in the form of hard or soft copy, as per the convenience of the participants. The process led me to maintain the authenticity of data. Necessary addition and edition were made further from their original information.

The collected from students' narratives, and important written and other required information, were triangulated to ensure their real meanings captured. Furthermore, I listened to audio recordings repeatedly and read the transcribed text to match whether the

information was exactly transcribed or not. The information was transcribed maintaining general ethos and omitting the clichés. I made some sort of coding. The transcription of audio narratives was revised, analyzed and subjected to slight revision. Thereafter, themes were established on the processes of identity construction and categorized into positioning, opportunity and transformation to understand how these processes support to construct multiple identities of the students in their EFL classroom. After developing themes and sub-themes, the data was analyzed them based on thematic and structural analysis of Riessman's (2008) narrative inquiry analysis method. The content of what the students said with their intact stories helped in the thematic analysis whereas the referential meaning of interviews based on classroom context, their discursive patterns and structures helped in the structural narrative analysis.

## Findings

Based on my research question and prolonged engagement with eight students, I have drawn several insights related to the processes of students' identity construction in English medium secondary schools in Nepal. The insights, particularly focused on how positioning, opportunity and transformation supported to construct discourse identity, affinity identity, social identity, L1 identity, authored identity, being and becoming, student identity and inner circle identity in the Nepalese EFL context.

## Positioning in Students' Identity

The students in English medium secondary schools ascribe different positions in their EFL classrooms. The position is constructed from their discursive practices whereby they are located in conversations and their constant on-

going negotiations of how they relate to the classroom world (Pennycook, 2001). Students' positioning holds a minimal identity work in a foreign language classroom (Block, 2007) and gain mastery of communicative competence as the classroom itself is a rich environment for academic and social orientations.

While engaging in the classroom discourses, the students were found constructing **Discourse Identity** in their EFL classroom constructed through the pattern of thinking, speaking, behaving and interacting (Miller & Marsh, 2003 as cited in Clarke, 2008). While listening to the discourses, I found Sulav a fluent speaker having native-like pronunciation as;

*I improved my English from sixth grade when one of my friends suggested me to listen to English songs, native speakers' voice and watch English movies from the YouTube. I did so and started reading novels, prose and fiction which gradually helped my English.*

I situated meaning from his discourse as a tool of inquiry (Gee, 2005) to understand his discourse positioning as a 'native-like fellow'. Discourse identity was developed by listening to English songs, native speaker's voices and reading books. Like Sulav, Supriya's verbal ethos projected her as a fluid actor and thinker (Gee, 2005) as she said 'Ah, I see myself as an average learner; though I am better than others in the class.' The excerpt of Supriya positioned herself as 'a medium learner' who can speak English better. Similarly, Sanjeev's discourse constructed that he was from an elite class in 'Yeah, there are my father; an engineer and brother; an MBBS doctor support me in difficult vocabularies, grammar and writing patterns.'

In the same line, the students were found constructing their **Social Identity** through social positions established by the students based on classroom norms, cultures, interactions and conversations. Supriya's expression *'I actively take part in classroom interaction with the teacher and students'* reflected her active classroom participation (Dreier, 2003 as cited in Wortham, 2004) because the class is her social CoP from where she learnt trajectories of learning among the students. She constructed her social identity by actively participating in interaction actively in social identification process (Bakhtin, 1981 as cited in Wortham, 2004) which involved the use of classroom resources to construct her social identity. My participants constructed social identity by participating in practice (asking question and responding) done in the class improve their speaking skills. Her consistent involvement in reading, role play, participation and reflection constituted her classroom culture. Utsukta constructed social identity through interaction as she claimed *'Students in the school must speak English compulsorily. Even the slow learners speak whatever they know. This improves their habit of learning English.'* Her response to student's compulsory participation in the class was a claimed processor (Wenger, 1998) which gave a certain experience of participation, interaction and communication in the classroom. Interestingly, Sulav improved his English only after participating in reciting the dialogues of Harry Porter when he was in class two as he shared his experience *'My English teacher told me to recite the dialogues of Harry Porter in the school annual function. At that time, he forced me to take part by telling me that my English was better.'* Among his friends, he was ascribed the role by his English teacher and his social positioning *'his English is good'* was constructed by social interactions he had taken part. For him, playing the role was an event performed in the social setting of a classroom that ascribed

his individual identity *'person having good English'*. The identity ascribed as *'I am good, yeah good among the friends, and I am the best'* positioned him to construct his social identity in the classroom. His understanding of himself as 'good' (Norton, 2013) and being self-recognized as 'the best' (Gee, 2001) about other friends constructed him a certain identity ascribed from social values and positioning brought in his class among other students. Sulav's understanding of looking at 'self' as 'good' is his identity and his academic relationship to others as the best infers the future possibilities that constructed him a separate recognition.

Institution Identity is the next identity the students constructed in the EFL classroom. Sulav's identity as 'the School Head Boy', Supriya's 'the School Prefect', and Utsukta's 'the School Vice-Prefect' were 'institution identities' (Gee, 2001) proposed by their principal considering their command over the English language. The institution empowered them to construct an institution identity looking at his language propensity. Therefore, they were handed over such responsibilities. The institution identity was constructed for Sulav due to his self-reflection of 'who he is' (Gee, 2005). It was a very powerful tool to look at the 'self' of Supriya because she was appointed 'the Head Girl' due to her English proficiency demonstrated at school. Likewise, Utsukta took the position of Vice - Prefect officially as she revealed;

*This is my second year of being nominated as the school vice-prefect. The school evaluated my performance and handed over the responsibility again for this year; perhaps looking at my English language. I try my best to discharge my duties and responsibilities and try to promote my school.*

Utsukta's institutional identity was valued by evaluating how actively she fulfilled the role of vice-prefect in her school and the duty endorsed upon her. The same case was there with Andeela, as she expressed; *I am the secretary of School Child Club. My school and teacher handed me this opportunity thinking that I can promote English Zone, conduct various extra-curricular activities in English and assist fellow students to speak in English.* This shows that her school assigned the responsibility of secretary of school child club.

Sometimes, the students make their perfect plan of what they want to be in future based on their present performances. They are the sole 'self' constructing meaning, addressing answers of their life and creating their world (Torfing, 1999 as cited in Clarke, 2008) far beyond knowledge and capacity to construct **Authored Identity**. Supriya wanted to be a social worker. She worked on improving her English to tackle future obstacles. She did not like to be confused in her dream as she revealed *'I want to be a social worker in future. I am working on my vocabularies to support my career. My English helps me to talk to the people found in the society as this is a place of a diverse world'*. Likewise, Sulav authored his future world and said *'I am clear in my way. After passing grade X, I join +2 in science. I go abroad to be a nuclear physicist after my +2. I will be successful because I am good at English to communicate with others around the world.'* Sulav, at this point, authored himself to be a nuclear physicist. He was an individual agentive being constantly searching new social and linguistic resources to allow him to resist his present identity of a learner posited him undesirable ways' (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). He was confident to substantiate his world in the expression *"I am pretty sure to be in my dream"* as a part of the process of agentive improvisation to posit the self.

Many students were found arranging their fixed seats and close friends were sitting together based on their interests, demands, age factors and nature. Their seats are arranged either by themselves or by their teachers. Such activities in the class construct **Affinity Identity** (Gee, 2001). Such affinity relation was made up of people who might be dispersed across a large space from different linguistic and ethnic background. The affinity relation was not limited only to a close circle of limited friends; it was limited to a large space with people having common cultures and norms.

Most of the students were found talking in the Nepali language despite strict rules in English medium schools and constructed **L1 Identity** as a native fallacy. Despite strict school rules, the students were found speaking the Nepali language as a crude identity marker (Block, 2007). Regarding L1 identity, Sanjeev mentioned that *'All the students in the class (except a few) speak Nepali when there is no teacher. I also speak Nepali with my friends because I can be more open up in Nepali than in English'*. From this excerpt, I found that the students constructed L1 identity automatically. The main reason for speaking L1 was to open up among the friends easily. I found Sanjeev speaking English only with certain groups and Nepali with most of their friends. I called it as a native fallacy; perhaps speaking English all the time was doing ridiculous (Block, 2007). He constructed his L1 identity not because of a lack of English proficiency but because of his L1 identity as deep abiding pride. Likewise, Shikha constructed her L1 identity in her class as; *I speak English in front of teachers and some students. The school nominates a spy to continue the English-speaking trend. I often talk to my friends in Nepali because I can express my feelings openly.* In English language learning, the participants use their native language as a linguistic input to switch along with the target

language. They switch to L1 identity all of a sudden because L1 is their first representation of discourse communication. Such a native fallacy was a linguistic and cultural baggage (Block, 2007) carried out along with the target language while learning English as a second/foreign language.

## Opportunity in Students' Identity

Students' equal participation in learning is an opportunity for the students of English medium secondary schools and their joint engagement in having interaction is supplementary. Such opportunities were learning situations and provided a foundation for student identity. The family, parents and schools were the sources of getting new opportunities which differ from individual to individual, time to time and context to context due to which different identities are formed.

From (pre)primary to secondary education, I found that the identity of the students was not "static and one dimensional, but multiple and changing" (Norton & Toohey, 2002, p.116). Learning English in (pre)primary level was found to be a site of struggle (Norton, 2013) for all my participants which later on shifted as an opportunity to their secondary level to become a learner (Supriya, Sulav, Utsukat, Sanjeev). Deepak's ups and downs, Sulav's inclination towards English and Supriya's attraction to English were the output of becoming learners. Let me put forth Sulav's revealing ideas here as;

*I am from Gulmi. My parents took me to Kathmandu from there and enrolled in Himalaya Higher Secondary School up to class five. In class six, I was enrolled in this school. My English is now good, yeah... good, better than others'. I can speak English*

*fluently and express my feelings better... My English teacher is supportive and he encourages me to do better in English. When I was in sixth grade, one of my friends suggested that I should listen to English songs and watch English films and so did I. I found English films and movies original, and they helped with pronunciation, grammar structures and vocabulary.*

Sulav's stories indicated that identity is a process of 'becoming'. His present condition as 'a better learner' is his 'Being' or existence. To construct the identity of 'being', the students practice English a lot by listening to English songs, watching English movies, reading English novels and watching English channels. During the practice session, they exercised 'becoming'. All the participants got the opportunity to learn English at school and constructed their 'being'. Sometimes 'becoming' remains as a site of struggle as Deepak revealed;

*I am from a remote part of Gorkha. After getting a donation from one of the British citizens, I came to Kathmandu, enrolled in a private school and started learning English. Learning English was chewing iron in early grade. So, I learnt English and Nepali simultaneously. I learnt English translating into Nepali to Gurung language. I improved my English from class six by listening to English songs, watching movies, and interacting with friends and teachers. Now, I can express my feelings.*

Deepak shaped his being with the help of friends, teachers, English movies and songs. I did not find his visible identity in learning (Cummins, 2006); rather a way of crisis, assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable by the experience of doubt and uncertainty (Mercer, 1990 as cited in Block, 2007).

## Transformation in Students' Identity

The students in the class possessed *Learner Identity*. Sulav's sense of self-recognition as a medium learner, Deepak's site of struggle, Andeela and Bishal's gradual improvement, and Utsukta's participation in scholastic and non-scholastic activities inside and outside the school reveal their learner identity. The classroom culture of providing equal opportunity in participation shaped their learner identity. This made them competent to interact in the class among with friends. This was their sense of recognition as a learner from their overall learning spectrum to shape them a learner as Supriya shared;

*I am good at writing essays and poems for which I am seeking new words from the dictionary. I pick up new words used by my teacher; note them down and pronounce them phonetically. All the friends participate in the learning process collaboratively. Learning English is never completed. Of course, We engage in various activities.*

Supriya constructed her student identity and showed her avid interest in writing essays and poems. She noted down new words used by the teachers and students and used other similar contexts. She used conscientious knowledge to pick up new vocabularies and using them in daily life. Deepak's frequent visits to the British library to read English books for future benefit to take IELTS and TOEFL tests and his regular seat planning in Maths, English and Science periods constructed his distinct identity as a student. Similarly, Sanjeev's expression '*whenever I get time, I listen to BBC and native speaker's voice on YouTube and read English novels*' also revealed his learner identity. It was found that the students were social agents who actively joined in learning activities through which they constructed student identity.

The students were found to shift their position in learning English and transformed their academic performance. Sulav's identity as a native-like fellow, Supriya's nimble social worker and Utsukata's obsessive orator were not transformed overnight, rather took a process of transformation in language capability and thinking power. Coming from a rural area, Deepak learnt the English language as a symbol of transformation to accomplish his dream of gaining an *Inner Circle Identity* (Kachru, 1983). Deepak's interpretation '*I am making my English better to be a British citizen*' constructed inner circle identity from his complex participative experience and reificative projection (Wenger, 1998) to get native-like orientation in his linguistic performance. All the students were found to get mastery of native-like English. This clearly showed distinction between 'us and them' division with 'inner, outer' and expanding circle' (Kachru, 1983) and central and periphery (Philipson, 1992). Deepak wanted to be in 'inner circle' (powerful Western countries where English language as a native language) from the peripheral dichotomy (Underdeveloped country where English is a second or foreign language) looking at the possibility that 'centre' has high stakes in maintaining his operation.

The excerpt above clearly illustrates Deepak's interest in constructing inner circle identity by going to the UK, the powerful western country where English is their native language. Sulav substantiated his idea as; '*I need to have good English to go abroad to be a nuclear physicist in future. I, therefore, want to make native-like English to be an international citizen going everywhere around the world and communicating with the global citizen.*'

Sulav would like to be an international citizen by making his native-like English and communicating with global citizens. Like Sulav, Andeela transformed her outer circle identity into inner circle learning from English movies, songs, newspapers and books.

The students were interested to go UK to venture into their imagined community, their ideal world, so that they can have access to practice and develop language skills, and they realize their identity as *Imagined Identity*. Sulav's interest to be an international citizen, Deepak's British citizen, Supriya's Social worker, Utsukta's Radio Jockey and Shikha's MBBS doctor are their imagined identity. They expected to construct imagined identities by learning English, viewing themselves as their current identities and looking at themselves as becoming. Going abroad and talking with people around the world was Sulav's imagined community and his wish to be a 'nuclear physicist' is his imagined identity. He assumed 'abroad' as an 'imagined community' accepting Anderson's (1991) concept of the nation as an "imagined community ... imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know their fellow-members, meet them, and even hear for their communion" (p. 6). Let me put here Shikha's narrative experiences as she shared;

*I want to be a doctor. I want to serve the patients who are suffering from disease. I need English to write prescriptions, follow instruction from other doctors and prescribe medicine to foreign patients. Therefore, I am making my English better.*

Shikha's imagined community was a 'hospital' where she constructed her imagined identity

i.e. a 'doctor'. Imagined community refers to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of imagination (Norton, 2013). She constructed her imagined identity transcending her present identity as a student by improving English in English medium schools. In this sense, Shikha's imagined identity was like 'looking at apple and seed and seeing a tree' (Block, 2007). Sometimes, imagined imagined community is affiliated with an imagined identity that extends beyond local sets of relationships (Warriner, 2007 as cited in Norton, 2013). An imagined community is no less than a real community to all my participants where they had daily engagement and a strong impact on their current actions. To improve English, Deepak frequently visited the British Library to fulfill his dream of improving his English and go to Britain with his donor.

## Conclusion

Students' identity arises from classroom interactions that is associated with prominent school roles that results from a desire to shape their surroundings and social bonds. Students in English medium schools develop complex identities influenced by positioning, opportunity, and transformation, which intersect in the classroom, ultimately contributing to their academic success. This study explores how students in English medium schools develop diverse identities through positioning, opportunity, and transformation. These identities include discourse, social, institutional, authored, affinity, and L1 identities, all primarily influenced by positioning. Opportunity, mainly within the classroom, leads to learner and inner circle identities, while transformation is linked to inner circle and imagined identities. These

<sup>1</sup>Basnet, A. (2021, May). Construction of student identity in the Nepali EFL classroom. Retrieved from ELT CHOUTARI: <http://eltchoutari.com/2021/04/identity-construction-of-the-nepali-eflstudents/>

identities intermingle across various aspects of students' lives. Discourse identity is shaped by linguistic patterns, reflecting a power/knowledge system and attributing societal values to actions. L1 identity often comes from a connection to the native language, Nepali. 'Becoming and being' and learner identities are tied to educational opportunities. English medium students also cultivate inner circle identities to become proficient in English. These identities can be attributed through the school or self-constructed endeavours.

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