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Challenges in Diverse Classroom of School: Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to explore the challenges faced by teachers in diverse school classrooms and the possible way to solve the problem from the perspective of teachers themselves. In an increasingly multicultural and inclusive educational landscape, teachers play a crucial role in teaching learning experiences for students with varying backgrounds, abilities, and needs. Through a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design, this investigation collected data through semi-structure interviews with a sample of teachers. The findings of this study reveal several common challenges that teachers encounter in diverse classrooms. These challenges encompass issues related to classroom management, differentiation of pedagogies, language barriers, and addressing diverse learning styles. This research emphasizes the need for ongoing support and resources to help teachers navigate the challenges of diverse classrooms effectively and ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students.

Keywords: diversity, environment, inclusive, and management

Background of the Study

Diversity has been understood as the result of a specific, culturally formed socialization process with a particular type of behavior, thinking and emotion that is different from other socialization processes (Haan & Elbers, 2004) and social groups such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, when formulating and implementing policies and procedures because it may result in being either privilege or exploitation (Ankomah, 2020). Every individual is entitled to the respect of their dignity and rights; thus, it is imperative that everyone acknowledges and respects the uniqueness and diversity of others (Kohama et al., 2020). To

address the diverse classroom, the concept of inclusive education has been initiated so that every student getting a learning experience gets chance of equal participation, without any barriers and anticipates and considers a variety of learning needs. In current scenario, it is not limited being just as a mere inclusion but is seen as a strong educational tool providing opportunities for embracing human diversities in several forms. It has given a different point of view to see by bringing together the diverse set of students under a common and equal platform of education.

Varieties of languages and cultures are practiced throughout the world. Every community has its own set of values, beliefs, culture and language. It becomes quite complicated to choose appropriate terms to describe, words like multicultural are useful, trying to speak clearly may head towards accusations of stereotyping (Shulman& Bains, 1993). Multicultural classrooms include people from different backgrounds that influence their interests and values as well as their readiness to learn and teach, needing competent and knowledgeable teachers practicing equity, diversity, and social justice to create safe and welcoming environment (Ankomah, 2020). In a particular educational setting be it pre-school, school or at any other levels, students belonging to diverse culture study and gain knowledge. So, teachers need to understand each difference of the student in diverse classrooms (Kohama et al., 2020). To address the growing diversity brought to school by transnational learners in the classroom, teachers need to be well equipped with an expanded set of skills and approaches essential to engage diverse students to support effective learning (Moloney & Saltmarsh, 2016). Teacher education requires teachers to have the academic knowledge, skills, and values they need to become successful professional teachers (O'Neill, 1986). Students experience certain kind of culture and environment at home and altogether a different type of culture at school. This results in creating communication barriers for students as well as teachers. So, they tend to grasp, process and understand things in their own way. This too often creates difficulties for teachers and it is the scenario of the entire world.

In any diverse classroom throughout the world, the classroom set up the environment of the classroom, the language and words used to communicate needs to be highly taken care so that any miscommunication does not happen. Constitutional measures set stage for desegregation to unfold at schools by establishing the physical proximity of members of different groups in same school both in the personal attitudes of students and teachers and in institutional arrangements, and policies of school (Sayed, 2001). When teachers enter into a diverse school classroom, the first challenge for them is to understand and plan what is to be taught as the mother tongue of the students differs and they need to be communicated in understandable language (Moloney & Saltmarsh, 2016) Teachers are essential part of knowledge creation and dissemination. This requires teachers to be mentally and physically prepared to handle both the overt and hidden injustices in school system (Ankomah, 2020). Which is challenging for the teachers. This is mainly in the hands

of teacher who is responsible to practice such pedagogy and language that results in giving exact meaning of encoded words to the students who are decoding them. Hence, for a diverse classroom it is essential to have professional with pedagogical thoughtfulness of inclusive education teachers who can actually stand out in their given roles and can serve the purpose of diverse teaching pedagogy.

Teacher knowledge consists of different domains: content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and generic pedagogical knowledge (Shulman, 1986). Teacher training programmes should incorporate culturally sustaining pedagogy and socio-cultural responsive teaching to effectively prepare teachers for practice in a class of diverse learners (Vandeyar, 2017). Teachers need to divide all students into small groups with good balance of gender, caste, age and capacity. Then students should be asked to do project work in their classroom. The group work helps to develop confidence in students and it encourages students to involve in the learning process and promote good inclusive practices in the classroom learning. In this context, teacher gives an opportunity to all students according to their needs. It also refers to increasing the performance of low performers and socially, geographically backwards students. It helps students to learn from each other and make them feel fairness in their classroom during class time. This study is focus on teacher, dealing with the challenges on day-to-day basis in a diverse classroom.

Nepal is a multicultural and multilingual country. According to census 2021, there are 142 caste/ethnic groups and 124 languages spoken as mother tongue (National Statistics Office, 2023). Teachers need training to understand child psychology, child's home environment, and special needs children, girls' education and maintaining relationship among students and parents. Training helps teachers to give manage inclusive education (NCSE, 2007). In Nepal, there exists wide varieties of culture and ethnicity. This brings unique challenges in classrooms, students may speak different mother tongues, making it challenging for teachers to effectively communicate and ensure everyone understands the material (Khanal, 2017). It has defined diverse education as liberal education system that believes in the child centred pedagogy, respect multicultural and multilingual orientations in a non-discriminatory environment (Acharya, 2020). Mostly we can see school culture and home cultural is not same in the developing country like Nepal (Khanal, 2017). We live in a country full of diverse culture and lifestyle. But we do not accept the diversity with an open heart. Teaching in a diverse classroom and treating every student at par no matter who they are, from where they belong, needs patience and practice. Tolerance building among the students and the school staff may help to reduce discrimination. Students, teachers, and the school system can eventually learn how to accommodate those with disabilities and disadvantages, so they too can gain the same education. Diversity allows students to learn one of the most important basic lessons of life; having strength and unity in diversity. By learning to get along with other from different

backgrounds, students can learn how differences can strengthen the individual and the community surrounding them. Teachers need to be culturally sensitive and aware to create an inclusive and harmonious classroom environment.

Cultural diversity is quite common in schools and it is crucial to develop studies that consider academic achievement and its relationship with different psychological variables in students of different cultural groups (Herrera et al., 2020). Many studies concentrate on diversity in terms of race or ethnicity, but other aspects of diversity, such as socio-economic status, language proficiency, learning disabilities, or gender identity, are not receive as much attention. Challenges in diverse classrooms may vary significantly depending on the geographic location and cultural context. Research may benefit from more localized, context-specific studies to address region-specific challenges. There are a gap in research exploring the challenges of diverse classroom of the school. More research is needed on specific teaching strategies that are culturally responsive and inclusive, as well as how these strategies influence student engagement and learning outcomes.

Objectives of the Study

- To identify the challenges faced by teachers while conducting diversity classroom practices from teachers' perspective.
- To explore possible ways to address the challenges in diversity classroom.

Literature review

Perspectives on Classroom Diversity

Classroom diversity encompasses a range of differences among students, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, ability, language, religion, and cultural background. Nowadays, usually the teachers and students having different languages and culture come together to a classroom. The students at times do not understand what is being taught which affect teachers influenced by their identities, beliefs and value systems (Vandeyar, 2017). Teachers should not only be examined about teaching a class of diverse learners but should also explore the effectiveness of their practices in accommodating the various; cultures, lifestyles, and learning styles of the students (Vandeyar, 2017). Trust in a multicultural classroom can be an issue, because students and teachers come from a variety of backgrounds that affect not only their interests and values but also their willingness to learn and teach the curriculum (Ankomah, 2020). As this seem a bit challenging for teachers, practicing diverse classroom teaching. Teachers face so many difficulties in the diversity classroom. Students from different linguistic backgrounds may face challenges in understanding and expressing themselves in the language of instruction. This can affect their academic performance and social integration. Different cultural norms, values, and

communication styles can lead to misunderstandings or conflicts among students or between students and teachers. Students learn in different ways, and what works for one student may not work for another. Teachers need to employ diverse teaching strategies to accommodate various learning styles. Preconceived notions and stereotypes about race, gender, religion, or other identities can create a hostile or unwelcoming environment for some students. Some students may have more access to educational resources, technology, or support outside of school, which can contribute to disparities in achievement. Educators need to be aware of their own biases and continually educate themselves about different cultures to create an inclusive environment.

Diversity of Classroom in the Context of Nepal

Nepal is the country of diversity from various perspectives such as cultural, social, ethnic, language, and so on. School is the centre point of the society. Cultural discrepancies found at home and school are evident in countries around the globe, including developing countries like Nepal (Khanal, 2017). Students from different castes, ethnicity, and cultural background come to one place and spend their time together. Nepal is country full of diversity and member of United Nations since 1955. Several casts and religious diversities define our social segment (Acharya, 2020). Nepal being a multi-cultural nation, but the national education system has designated uniform curriculum and pedagogical resources for all the students (Khanal, 2017). These diversities can be seen in our classroom. Our classroom teaching is based on uniformity principle, which does not serve the purpose in classroom. Teaching in a diverse classroom and treating every student at par no matter who they are, from where they belong, needs patience and practice. The curriculum should reflect the diverse experiences and contributions of various cultures and identities in the context of Nepal. A mono-cultural curriculum can marginalize students from non-dominant backgrounds. Students from certain backgrounds may face systemic challenges that affect their academic performance. This could be due to factors like poverty, discrimination, or lack of access to quality education.

Pedagogical Strategies for Effective Diverse Classroom

Creating an inclusive and effective diverse classroom requires a combination of thoughtful planning, open communication, and adaptable teaching strategies. Hence, the teachers have to educate themselves about different cultures, traditions, and perspectives represented in the classroom and avoid making assumptions based on stereotypes. As a Sanskrit phrase of Maha Upanishad says, 'VasudhaivaKutumbakam' that means the world is one family, we all are living in the world full of diversity and everyone should understand and accept the differences of each other (Vivekananda International Foundation, 2019). Human relations approach to multi-cultural education emphasize improving communication between people of different cultural backgrounds (Sleeter & Grant,

1987) In the classroom, support and teamwork is necessary to focus on theoretical perspectives but also focuses on the diversity of all students in the classroom (Acharya, 2020). Culturally responsible teachers are not only adapted to integrate pedagogy, teaching techniques, and traditions embracing specific culture groups, it is also getting a mental set that is easy to learn and encourages diversity in the learning experience (Ragoonaden et al., 2015). Social learning theory is centered towards education which happens in a social context. It is believed that people learn from each other, including concepts like observation education, copying, and modeling (Ormrod, 1999). Humanist education theory is based on the philosophy of humanist theory of psychology including person-centered theory (Gould, 2012). This theory as well as approach in education relates to humanistic psychology, with major concepts focusing on the aspect that children are good at the core and education needs to give emphasis on rational ways to teach the whole child. If the language is not understood, a student will not be able to concentrate on learning. It has identified the personal need of student as well as teacher in a diverse classroom. Hence, the teacher helps the students to solve the language problem which enables them to focus properly on education. Humanistic learning theory focus on helping students to develop their learning skills. Students are responsible for learning choices, so helping them understand the best ways to learn is key to their success.

Methodology

This study was grounded on phenomenology approach will analyses through qualitative methods. Phenomenology is a qualitative approach that examines the lived experiences for individuals concerning a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The phenomenology design is suitable for this study to gather information about challenges face at the diverse classroom of school. This study was related to explore possible ways to address the challenges in diversity classroom. This study focuses on the challenges and issues faced by teachers in drawing attention towards diversity classroom practices from teachers' perspective. There were three participants under this study, two secondary level social studies teacher at government school and other secondary level Math teacher at private school. They were selected through purposive sampling method to fulfill the requirement of this study. Furthermore, the researcher used the semi structure interview to interpret the data from different perspectives. This study had a broad focus on understanding the teacher role in diverse classroom, understanding diverse learners, classroom environment and teaching interventions. With its very broad brief, specific attention to cultural and linguistic diversity is limited.

The data collection had been done by conducting audio visual through Whats App interview of participants. The researcher obtained informed consent from participants, ensuring they fully understand the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study. Participants were informed

about their rights, including their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Privacy and confidentiality of participants were protected by using pseudonyms and removing identifying information from data and reports. The researcher behaved with the participants with respect, dignity and fairness throughout the research and also maintained open communication and addressed any concerns or questions the participants had. The researcher used inductive approach under the thematic analysis method to analyze the data. This approach enabled to make a framework of analysis of data in accordance with her research purposes. This study had been recorded for the purpose of information at the time of interview with participants. Every recorded data was transcribed, coded, build themes and triangulate themes. The researcher applied this strategy to analyse the data and made conclusions of the findings.

Result and Discussions

Challenges of Diverse Classroom

There are several challenges associated with managing diversity in the classroom. These challenges can arise due to differences in cultural backgrounds, learning styles, abilities, and experiences among students. Students with different linguistic backgrounds may struggle with understanding and expressing themselves in the primary language of instruction. Teachers need to employ strategies to support language acquisition and ensure comprehension. Under the scenario of this study, Classroom diversity such as gender, caste, language, social and economic status is found in the schools. Due to language problems, teachers had not been able to create a child-friendly environment in the classroom. First participant Hari (pseudo name) from government school, he started his teaching five years ago. Hari is from Pahari community and he got appointed in a school located in Madhesi community. Initially, he was totally unaware of Maithili language. It creates a bilingual environment in the classroom. Hari state, *"In my school most of the students understand only Maithili and they do not know much Nepali. But I am totally unknown from Maithili, it is challenging for me"*.

The second participant Shikha (pseudo name) from government school also faced multilingual environment in the classroom. The diversity of caste like Brahmin, Chettri, Newer, Tamang and Chepang students exists over there, they speak different language like Nepali, Magar and Chepang. Hence, classroom environment was multilingual. Shikha state, *"I can speak and understand Nepali and English language, but some students in my class cannot understand both language. Student speak Magar and Chepang. I am totally unknown from those languages"*. Both were social studies teachers, they had to teach about the local context and their social environment. But they were unknown of those things. This was also a challenge for them.

The third participant Krishna (pseudo name) from private school shared almost same kind of views and experience. There were students belonging to different back ground in the class. They were speaking different languages were studying in one class which created challenges in communication. Some of the students in his class from the Marwari community, many of them do not use Nepali or English in their own home, speak Hindi in their home. Due to this, it is challenging for Krishna to teach in the diverse classroom. Krishna state, *"I am a private school teacher, I have to teach the children in English language. But problem is that many children cannot understand that. Some of them speaks Marwari and some Nepali, but only few students speaks English."* Sometimes, Krishna has to explain to a particular student in the middle of the class in different languages which creates problems and it hinders his speed and effectiveness in implementing the plans of certain lessons.

Apart from this, other challenges arise here, the students in the classroom speak different languages, but the curriculum is the same for all. The participants of this study have almost same disclosure about the curriculum. When students do not understand the language in the classroom. The teacher should provide individualized instruction, but this is not always possible in large classroom settings (Khanal, 2017). It is also challenging for all the teachers. Teachers have to complete all the content given in the textbook within a limited time, so time management is also challenging task for the teachers of diverse classroom.

Teachers Address the Diversity in the Classroom

Addressing diversity in the classroom is a critical aspect of creating an inclusive and effective learning environment. Teachers recognize that students have diverse learning styles, abilities, and needs. They adapt their teaching methods, materials, and assessments to accommodate these differences. In this study, the first participant Hari stated *"I teach students with the help of ICT and help of those few students who has some knowledge of Nepali and he made them as a means of communicate and convey what is being taught to the rest of the class."* Hari used ICT as a medium to solve that issue by using smart board. Being a social teacher, he used methods like pictorial presentations of climatic condition and geographical condition of Nepal, chart and sign languages were used. Later on, he learnt the local language and is still learning to teach the students. However, the students in this class share common language so there did not happen problem of multiple local languages. Moreover, he took extra time after his working hours to explain the concepts to the weak students. Being a social teacher, Hari taught his students to accept and respect every religion in the classroom.

The second participant Shikha stated *"I create group of the students in my classroom, who speak the same language with those who are struggling with language comprehension"*

in classroom. They can help each other understand the material in the classroom." Being a social teacher, Shikha should teach her students about society and environment. For that, she insists the parents to know about the local environment and society for effective classroom. All the participants in this study, used charts and images to support understanding in their classroom. That helped transcend language barriers in the diverse classroom. Also, teachers use smart board and YouTube to create classroom interesting and interactive.

The third participant Krishna stated *"I started teaching nine years ago. I do not do any discrimination and providing equal opportunities to everyone is my first duty and I am doing that lawfully. I am a math teacher so, I does not require any special language to clear the concept."* Krishna always encouraged students to ask questions, wherever they became confuse or did not understand. This can help identify areas of confusion and allow him to address them. He teaches all the classes using English language only, but when student become confused due to language, he teaches student in using Nepali and Hindi also for clear the concept of students.

Teachers should take note of students' teaching problems and provide instructions to address their students' individual needs (Khanal, 2017). According to Socio culture theory, language is social from the very beginning of life and first appears in communication and for communication (Vygotsky, 1962). In the classroom teachers should not only teach, but teachers need to understand psychology of all student, make interactive classroom. This is so much difficult for the teacher. Classroom management is a crucial aspect of effective teaching. It involves creating a positive and productive learning environment where students can thrive academically and socially. Hence, the effective classroom management is an ongoing process that requires patience, empathy, and a willingness to adapt. It's also important to maintain a balance between being firm and being compassionate, as this helps create a positive and productive learning environment for all students.

Use of ICT in the Diversity Classroom Practice

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a crucial role in promoting inclusive and diverse classroom practices. First participant Hari expressed his feeling about use of ICT in the classroom like this, *"Students are not aware of the use of ICT and internet there, but I use smartboards to teach them and sometimes use YouTube to play videos to teach the subject and I use Google to search for it when I feel any confusion in a subject matter."* Hari teach student through use of ICT, it reduces language problems and clears the course related to the concept. He easily teaches students about current events and global issues with the help of projectors. Also, he shows globes and other geographic pictures that can clarify students' concepts. The second participant Shikha was also a social teacher; therefore, she stated almost same things. She stated, *"I used projectors for teaching where in YouTube videos are referred related to topics,*

information search is done from Google, and Power Point presentation."

The third participant Krishna stated, *"Some of them are very aware of technology prevailing in the society and some of them are not. While explaining about the concepts related to the topic I am strictly confined to the area which is neutral and is approachable to everyone."* When Krishna provide them with assignment related to the project, based on Maths, he needs to take care of the availability of the requirements which is in reach of everyone. Because of this also heam not able to conduct the project classes efficiently as this affects the guardian economically. Further, he said ICT included in the school curriculum. He used some Audio/video materials and in terms of geometry we often take the help of several shapes and figures which can be easily made by them.

ICT helps improve students' abilities and their learning. So, ICT collaborative education can also be incorporated into the classroom teaching profession curriculum, there are different activities to meet the needs of each student (Domalewska, 2014). Technology addresses equity and access issues for learners. The use of technology allows teachers to modify teaching strategies and learning processes, and all types of learning styles to be more inclusive (Hollenbeck & Hollenbeck, 2009). Technical supportive learning promotes language development and critical thinking skills as student (Domalewska, 2014). Technology can assist the teacher in crossing the language barrier that exists in a diverse classroom (Hollenbeck & Hollenbeck, 2009). The use of audio visual methods has been proved as one of the very effective ways to make students learn and understand. Talking about the participants, all of them stated that they use projectors for teaching where in YouTube videos were referred related to topics, information search is done from Google, and many other. However, majority of the students cannot afford to have computer/laptop and internet at their homes.

Classroom Teaching Linking with Students' Daily Life Context

It is a crucial aspect of effective education. This approach helps students see the relevance and applicability of what they are learning, making it more engaging and memorable. The first participant Hari and second Shikha taught the concept related to social norms and beliefs by doing role play where students had to act. As they do not belong to that place, it was difficult for them to do so but they managed to do it by gathering information from the local people and parents. As they are social studies teacher, the syllabus contains culture related concepts as well. They took the students for field visit to local religious places to make them understand about the local cultural concepts. Hari stated, *"I relate the textbook with real life of the students. For example if I am teaching the topic social norms and value my method of teaching is discussion method .If I am teaching dowry system, doing role plays and making them understand practically."* And

Shikha stated, *"When I am teaching topic of social problems and solutions. I explain about social problem and ask the questions with students. What problems they see in their surrounding? How to solve that problems?"* She used discussion method of teaching to clear the concept about subject matter. Further, she also took students for field trips to historical places and demonstration method for teaching them about climate change with the ongoing climate change. The third participant Krishna stated, *"For teaching lesson of Profit and Loss, I makes the students play the role of customer and buyer."* This real time example will connect to them and they remember and understand the concept thoroughly. Another advantage of this diverse classroom include experience that teachers gain while using different pedagogies required to work closely with students. Making the inclusion of everyone within a supportive school system, a sense of community gets developed among the students as they live and learn with classmates from different backgrounds. Tolerance among them also sees a marked spike with their equal opportunity to learn and grow into the adults they are meant to be.

Gay (2000), defines "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 29 as cited by Ragoonaden et al., 2015). Cultural knowledge gained in school, family and society is the basis for children such as language, vocabulary, communication patterns, and education that play a catalytic role in educational success and children's social mobility (Khanal, 2017). Teachers connect subjects with students' daily life activities. This enables them to understand each other, as a whole learn and grow together. There is lack of practice in diverse classroom addressing the diverse need of the students. The teachers should be encouraged to be respectful, well trained and qualified and there should be multilingual pedagogy.

Conclusion

The diverse classroom presents a different kind of challenges from varying learning styles to cultural differences. Through the lens of participants under this study face some similar and some different kind of challenges while teaching. The most common reason found was diversity of culture and background followed by variation in language. Understanding and addressing these challenges is paramount in ensuring an inclusive and effective educational environment. Collaboration between teachers, administrators, parents, and the community is instrumental in finding sustainable solutions. The school environment shows how children's success in school is affected because there is a cultural gap between what they already have and what they really need. For that, teachers play an important role in filling the gaps. Teachers need to create an inclusive environment in a multilingual classroom requires time and effort. For that, teachers need to have a good knowledge of local language, must be qualified enough and well trained and well versed with ICT. From this study, it

has been found out that there are some shortcomings either with the teacher or with the students and facilities. The teachers have to go through a lot many processes to find out which method is perfect fit for the whole class. Likewise, implementing and managing diversity classroom becomes quite challenging in such scenarios. The participants under this study involve in a teaching practice where the students were taught to embrace every culture and religion with open heart, accept and respect diversity of each other. Then after, problems are faced even in managing diversity classroom Technology Integrated Pedagogy. The use of ICT is really useful in diversity classroom as making use of audio-visual teaching methods at schools enables teachers to teach in much more effective manner. This study sheds light on these challenges, it is important to acknowledge that further research is needed, particularly in exploring the long-term impacts of inclusive education on student outcomes. As we move forward, let us remain committed to creating classrooms where every student, regardless of their background, can thrive and reach their full potential.

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