

Exploring English Teachers' Pedagogical Wellbeing and Classroom Issues: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

This paper deals with the classroom issues of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in the context of Nepal and the EFL teachers' ways of addressing them. More specifically, it connects how pedagogical strengths help teachers address the issues that appear in language classrooms. The research has been carried out outlining the qualitative approach grounded in an interpretive research paradigm. The data were collected from three university teachers. Methodologically, the study adopts the three-dimensional narrative spaces as the prior procedures of research methods for theoretical insight. It concludes that teachers' profound knowledge and skills about their well-being are useful to integrate various cultures and content in the classrooms. Pedagogically inbuilt potentials of teachers maximally enhance learners' learning opportunities. Thus, the conclusion obtained in this study is assessed considering teachers' understanding, of classroom issues and their ways of addressing those problems but they may not be generalizable. However, it contributes to teachers' education in general and ELT practice in Nepal in particular.

Keywords: *narrative, pedagogy, pedagogical, practices, research, well-being,*

Introduction

Teachers are the change agent in society. Teachers' knowledge, skills and expertise determine the appropriate use of strategies and techniques in the language classroom. It is assumed that pedagogically sound teachers make successful delivery in their classrooms according to the level and interest of students. Teachers' pedagogical well-being is the concept that helps learners promote career prospects, personal growth and professional development. Teachers' pedagogical well-being refers to the state of teachers' cognitive as well as social capital which relates to teachers' ability to effectively teach and engage students artistically to ensure the transmission of knowledge and skills to the students. Teaching learning procedures are influenced by teachers, curricula, learners and assessments in higher education. In other words, the pedagogical well-being of an individual teacher and the students, the nature of the curricula designed, the level and the interest of the learner, and the overall assessment inculcate the success of the teaching-learning process (Bastola, 2017). Teaching is to develop a conceptual understanding of the subject matter to enrich knowledge and expertise in depth.

Thus, the processes of teaching and learning have been transformed; therefore, the pedagogies in the 21st century demand knowledge about technology, critical pedagogy and the digitalization of classroom culture (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012). They further claimed that the creation of new knowledge requires a dual connection of new pedagogies and digital tools, and these are always expected to be present in today's classroom. Thus, it is considered that

teaching and learning are core phenomena of enhancing partnership between students and teachers where they share, collaborate, and practice with digitally savvy tools.

Moreover, classrooms in the 21st century are expected to be technologically equipped with multimedia, students are expected to have access to the internet and teachers to be techno-savvy. Thus, the teachers and the students confront different issues due to the problem caused by classroom setting arrangements, students' disruptive behaviours, teachers' lack of planning and preparation, etc. in the classroom. For Euler (2015) there are four issues in the language classroom; the motivation and credibility of the teacher, individual cognitive and emotional learning conditions, a positive and motivational classroom climate and previous knowledge. Similarly, Bartolo and Smyth (2009) state that the classrooms in the 21st century are changing and so are the materials and methodologies. Therefore, the teachers are expected to serve "a high-quality education for increasingly diverse university population coming from different racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds and different abilities which is possible through only teacher education" (p. 117). Every teacher has to find appropriate tools and provide facilities to improve their learning. Likewise, Ahmad et al. (2012) believe that classroom teaching has issues, not due to the learners alone but due to the lack of the teacher's competency to create the setting, decorate the classroom appropriately and speak to the children clearly and respond to their questions. Thus, it is assumed that pedagogical well-being and teaching skills often help to bring positive changes in English language classrooms in Nepal. Rahman, Tambi, and Anny (2020) state that teachers' knowledge to design lesson plans, manage classroom environments, and scaffold students to solve their problems is the basic requirement of teachers' well-being.

Statement of the Problem

The teachers and students are the prime stakeholders of the teaching-learning process. The practice of teaching and learning activities makes a strong foundation with the teachers' knowledge and their pedagogical expertise (Bastola, 2020). It means the role of teachers and their potential is significantly important to transform their skills. One of the rationales of this study is to understand contemporary ontological premises of pedagogical well-being and classroom issues that English teachers experience in their career prospects. I deliver my lecture, assign assignments and solve problems. Unfortunately, my students did not submit their assignments timely, they sometimes misbehaved, and they are found psychologically retarded. I experienced that there were some other infrastructure issues as well. Due to those anticipations, I tried to bring changes in their behaviours and discussed them with my colleagues. To be true, I made a preliminary assumption relating to the exposure provided to them including Smart TV, Projector, Internet access, the friendly nature of the teacher, etc.

I relate my conceptualization with different scholars who have assumed that the language classroom has multiple issues such as physical aspects (McLennan, 2009), psychological aspects (Ahmad-Shaari et al., 2012) and sometimes the classroom teaching efficacy is affected by linguistic problems (Lingard, Hayes, & Mills, 2003) and disciplinary issues provoking learners' attitudes and behaviour (Soares, 2007) in the context of Nepal. Considering what teachers already know and how they use their knowledge in classrooms are highly interpretative and contingent on knowledge of self, students, curricula and setting whose situatedness lie on one's pedagogical values and assumption. Since then, I questioned why postgraduate-level students do so in our EFL context. What could be done to motivate students in such a context? What different types of issues do the teachers experience at the postgraduate level? Therefore, by this research, I aimed to explore whether teachers' well-being, their pedagogical skills and methodological usage help to address the classroom issue

The Objective of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to examine the EFL teachers' pedagogical well-being and explore how their well-being, skills and practices help them address classroom issues.

Strategies for Enriching Teachers' Pedagogy

Strategy in teaching refers to a plan intended to achieve a particular teaching-learning goal. It helps the teacher to visualize the overall planning and comforts the learner to grasp the ideas more easily. There can be several strategies based on the content in the classroom. Collaboration is an effective strategy for teachers in the teaching and learning process (Lin, 2015). The different strategies are required to encourage interaction between teachers and students, peer-based learning through mentoring and sharing skills, expertise, and solutions to common issues. The fact is that teachers' well-being help teachers make proper utilization of their knowledge considering various factors such as socio-cultural environment, technological awareness, availability of resources, innovative thoughts, and so on.

Method of Study

I employed a qualitative approach under the interpretive research paradigm to explore teachers' pedagogical well-being and their capabilities to address classroom issues based on their lived experiences, stories, and actions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in the Nepalese context. I used narrative inquiry as a viable method (Coulter, Michael & Poynor, 2007) and the principle of narrative inquiry (Barkhuizen, 2019) for data elicitation and analysis. In this study, I particularly interviewed three university teachers teaching at the postgraduate level under the faculty of education from province no 1 namely Pramod, Roshan, and Nisha (these are pseudonyms for ethical consideration) to obtain data. Pramod was one of the experienced teachers having more than 15 years of teaching experience from school to university. Likewise, Nisha was educated in different regions and got lots of experience. She taught secondary-level students for more than 17 years and Roshan was from the Terai region. He hardly had an educational environment at his home, though, he had 20 years of teaching experience in his teaching career.

The approach for information generation was the teacher's narrative and those narratives were the real stories and lived experiences of my participants. To ensure the best representation of my participants', I raise participants' voices, experiences, and understanding. To make an initial understanding, I read the transcribed interview data and indicated coding. After data coding processing was done, those codes were merged into meaningful themes. Finally, I compared and substantiated the derived themes via appropriate literature.

Results and Discussion

The three research participants shared different experiences about how their pedagogical well-being helped them address issues in the classroom. My research participants indicated different issues and suggested some ways to overcome those issues. Based on the experiences that they shared through their narratives, I have thematized them into four themes mainly physical, psychological, linguistic, and disciplinary issues. The pedagogical richness of a teacher enhances learners in a better way. However, the experience of the three research participants' narratives has made significant contributions to pinpointing the issues and exploring the ways to address them in English language classrooms in Nepal.

Physical Issues

Naturally, learning a second language is often tough and tedious. Every second language learner and teacher faces difficulties in the process of learning and teaching. Different factors cause difficulties in language teaching and learning. The physical factor is one of the serious concerns in the language classroom (Ahmad- Shaari et al., 2012). The physical issue refers to the facilities available in the classroom including physical infrastructure. Large class sizes, students' diverse backgrounds, cultural differences, poor resources, etc. are the nature of our Nepali classroom. For Ahmad-Shaari et al. (2012) physical issues were simply an arrangement of desks and benches and proper arrangements of teaching resources and equipment.

Moreover, teaching-learning activities are closely connected to the physical infrastructure of the classroom; therefore, the teacher has to think and re-think about the preparation of physical resources. McLennan (2009) advocates that one of the essential issues every teacher has to address is physicality including the physical arrangement of the classroom. He further stated that the furniture and resource materials in the classroom are to be easily accessible and age-appropriate. Pramod shared, *"Physical issue refers to the substantial tools required in the classroom e.g., desks, benches, boards, ventilation, availability of resources etc. I believe that every teacher should manage the classroom properly for successful deliberation of the content knowledge"*. Pramod added that congested, narrowed and small classrooms do not support teachers to engage the student in different activities. Lack of physical tools and infrastructure in the language classroom, we cannot offer different projects, group and pair work etc. practically.

He further added teachers' competency and technological awareness are not sufficient but also resource materials, well-equipped classrooms, desks and benches of the classroom etc., matter. Therefore, considering the physical issue as one of the fundamental aspects of classroom teaching, we should manage large halls into appropriate classrooms, traditional tools into modern devices, and untrained human resources into trained and expert personnel. Thus, the classroom should allow teachers to arrange setting management in which they divide students into different groups and involve them in different forming lessons, plans, the pocket calendar, wall magazines, to news-story etc.

Nisha's understanding of Physical issues was similar to Pramod's. As she shared, *"I believe that learning is a rigorous process which requires a particular syllabus, a well-structured institution and learn-ability of teacher and students both. Teaching is always difficult without desks and benches, and re/source materials"*. She further claimed that the availability of the materials such as the internet, multimedia components/ facilities, light and ventilation of the classroom etc., affect the classroom output. Being closer to McLennan (2009) Nisha pinpointed that every classroom should be well-equipped with physical facilities and should be able to provide a good amount of exposure to learning.

Similarly, Roshan's narrative shared different experiences. As he shared, *"Physical issues desk, benches, ventilation, lights, available tools to use modern gadgets are the core components in the teaching-learning process and these components affect the overall embodiment of teaching."* Roshan further narrated that teaching without physical tools and infrastructures is almost impossible. The classroom today in the 21st century is assumed to be well-decorated and equipped with multimedia tools including projectors, Smart TV and other devices to address students from distinct cultural and linguistic backgrounds

In a nutshell, the narrative of research participants indicated that guidance and counselling, threat and treatment, etc. were the appropriate tools for him to improve students' performance in language classrooms either at school or university levels. They further shared

that they often employed the technique of awareness-raising, sharing success stories and experiences in small classrooms and for outnumbered classes, they conducted different activities such as poetry recitation, debate, quiz competitions, etc.

Psychological Issues

One of the striking ideologies in language teaching is to understand child psychology. Here, psychology is connected with a person's mind working efficiently to decide whether something is good or bad. Teaching learning activity is influenced by the psychological state of both the teachers and students. Thus, every teacher has to deal with the students' psychology. McLennan (2009) states that nurturing learners' potential is arranging a safe classroom space for learners. The safe classroom space ensures psychological strength among learners in which every child has to realize that their voice has been respected, their answers are appreciated, and they are free and fit all the time.

Moreover, learners' psychological or mental state is to be investigated to give a positive impression on the use of proper body language, eye contact, a clear voice and gesture (Dixie, 2008). He further advocated that a teacher's punctuality, personality, and professionalism make greater meaning for the learners. Therefore, the learners make their perception and psychology strong by looking at their teacher's ways of doing. Pramod shared, *"I find the state of mind of a child at the time of learning is very important to arouse positive interest. I feel, if I am aware of the psychology of my kids, I can handle the classroom normally"*. For Pramod, meaningful and effective teaching, teachers require background information about the learners and their psychological states. Sometimes, lower-level students have negative attitudes and poor psychological conditions in comparison to university-level students. Therefore, teachers investigate rude behaviours, negative attitudes, disruptive behaviours, and ill-tempered manners to bring positive changes in their learning. To address such issues, Pramod used motivation, encouragement and counselling techniques for positive psychological awareness.

Another participant Nisha experienced, *"Teaching requires a good knowledge about content, strategies and culture, knowledge about child psychology, technology etc. Among them, psychological issues (learn-ability of learners, content, state of learning) are fundamental issues in imparting knowledge to the learners"*. She further argued that teaching without understanding child psychology does not make any sense at all. She narrated an anecdote to me that there was a student named Aasha in her class. Aasha never did her homework since she was rude and ill-tempered. Nisha counselled and found out her weaknesses. Nisha counselled and convinced her. Finally, Aasha transformed herself and learnt a good lesson in her life. So, Nisha learnt that a teacher requires positive thought and psychological understanding and treating their learners -very often they have to be called by their names (Dixie, 2008).

Similarly, Roshan's view regarding psychology is also alarming. Roshan shared, *"Understanding child psychology is one of the most important components in learning. I find students having passive and negative attitude had a very low result"*. For Roshan, the psychological strengths of students become the prerequisite for every teacher to investigate. Roshan added no matter how much experience teachers have; it always matters how we treat our students for their learning. Investigating cultural backgrounds, examining psychological states, and facilitating them through modern and technological devices are the basics of the 21st-century classroom. It is always important to examine what students already know and how the learners wanted to learn. Hyden (2009) argues that teaching requires expertise;

teaching needs to be moving. It indicated that teaching in the real sense required an understanding of the psychological state of the learners along with their culture.

Linguistic Issues

Every society is rich enough in terms of its linguistic diversity and cultural disparity. Linguistic diversity and cultural disparity are not limited to society rather it arrives in the classroom context. Here, linguistic issues refer to the issues related to language such as target language vocabulary, grammar and especially pronunciation (Lopes, 2007), stress, tone, intonation, difficulty in reading and spelling, etc. that helps to improve learners' attitude. Similarly, linguistic issues are helpful to solve some linguistic problems such as passive attitude, hesitation to learn target culture, cent per cent use of mother tongue in EFL classroom, and lack of awareness, etc. in which roles of both learners and teachers are embedded.

The teacher has to realize the diversity and cultural phenomena because the students in our context come from different ethnic backgrounds with different mother tongues. Highlighting the importance of the linguistic asset, Pramod shared "*I experience incomplete knowledge of the language, difficulty in pronouncing the words, stress, vocabulary, comprehension (in a sense resistance, aloof nature, shyness, cleft in lips) etc. are some linguistic issues*". He further shared that the basic level students are greatly affected and influenced by culture but the university-level students do not have such problems rather they come with translation issues. Due to a lack of linguistic knowledge, the learners become unable to raise questions, express their feeling, and share emotions. Thus, for Pramod guidance and counselling are the two useful techniques to engage students in vocabulary-enriching games, reciting poetry and exposing them to different audiovisual clips for improving native-like competence in their learning.

Likewise, Roshan, one of my research participants shared that learning another language after acquiring the first language is difficult. Hence, in the classroom, every teacher has to diagnose linguistic issues such as the issue of pronunciation, stress, tone, intonation, difficulty in reading and spelling, etc. to support their learning. As Roshan shared, "*I understand students have linguistic problems due to lack of improper knowledge about language. As result, they are unable in raising questions, expressing their emotion and feelings, praise/complain about their dissatisfaction, etc. due to the problem in grammar, vocabulary and punctuation. I experience problems with stress, tone, pronunciation, vocabulary, and comprehension*". Roshan pointed out that linguistic issues can be language shocks for learners. So, we teachers need to be aware of students' problems and need to simplify the complexities of the course content. To address such issues, he employed awareness-raising techniques, raising consciousness, sharing experiences, etc.

Thus, linguistic diversity has been one of the undeniable issues to be considered in the language classroom. The shared narratives are closer to Lopes (2007) who states that children in the classroom have to pay proper concentration basically in the issue of pronunciation, stress, spelling, comprehension, etc. Thus, it is assumed that learners should not be restless and ill-tempered, rather they need to have the curiosity to learn new knowledge and know about the new world.

Disciplinary Issues

One of the significant values that every student and teacher must have, is discipline. It is a way of behaving that shows a willingness to obey rules or orders (Fremon & Wallbrown, 1979). The disciplinary factor is one of the crucial phenomena that determine the overall

personality of an individual. Students' disobedience, disruptive behaviours in the institution, irresponsibility, impoliteness, jealousy, attention seeking and impulsiveness, etc. are the issues faced by the teachers (Fremon & Wallbrown, 1979). Similarly, Soares (2007) considers discipline to establish teacher-student rapport and to manage learners' attitudes, aptitudes and behaviours. Being closer to Soares (2007), Pramod shares "*I consider disciplinary issues includes disobedience and disruptive talking to teachers, frequent switch into mother tongue while questioning and interacting, little concern on their assignments, losing temper whilst expressing their ideas, and feeling of superiority*". Pramod further pointed out that disruptive behaviours are found mostly at the higher level. He shared he had disciplinary confrontations many times with his students in university classes. However, he offered different activities such as guessing the meaning from the context, re/arranging jumble words, completing the story, dramatization, role play, etc. for enhancing their learning outcome.

Likewise, Nisha viewed the disciplinary issue as an important asset in the language classroom. She shared, "*I experience the use of profane language in the classroom, showing their disobedience and immorality, impoliteness and rudeness etc. are the major disciplinary issues*". *I teach students with a lesson plan, and teaching materials and bring different success stories of Stephen Hawkins, John Wood, and Jhamak Kumari Ghimire, etc. to give moral lessons in the classroom. I have been a failure many times because of the disruptive behaviours of the students.*

However, she often motivated and inspired them in their career development. She threatened the higher-level students and treated positively the lower ones. Discipline represents the culture of the students and culture ensures the quality of the students. The way the students learn things is the way they behave. Therefore, the students are to be taught good things for their lives. Roshan agrees that students are to be guided very positively by their progress and development. Roshan shared, "*Disciplinary issues refer to the ways of doing and behaving. To teach behavioural aspects, we need to raise awareness about their study, career, and life. When students are aware of their career, they try to be polite and obedient*". Roshan added his understanding that sharing stories, inspiring students about their goals, making them target oriented, etc. can be ways for improving learning outcomes. For improved teaching and learning, all the participants employed guidance, counselling, motivation, threat, treatment, and inspiration and shared their success stories and experiences. Comparing the views asserted by all the participants, I agree with Soares (2007) who states that teachers should encourage the students to make a code of conduct for their classroom which helps them avoid negativity in their class participation.

Conclusion

The study concludes with the insights of the participants that each participant has different experiences regarding their pedagogical well-being, class issues, and their ways to overcome them. The study reveals that physical, psychological, linguistic, disciplinary and academic issues are the major issues in the language classroom. My research participants conceptualize that pedagogical well-being is one of the key components to succeed in the language classroom. The study concludes that methodological strength, technological awareness, and context-specific content knowledge empower every individual teacher to solve classroom issues. The participants consider their use of pedagogical skills and expertise contributes largely to transforming the knowledge and skills of their students for the prior pedagogical enrichment.

Moreover, my research participants conceptualize the actual knowledge of teachers about classroom context enabling them to improve the overall teaching-learning process. For them, the use of pedagogical well-being in the English language classroom is to ensure to transfer of the content knowledge effectively to the learners and help them realize the actuality of their learning and bring a positive impact in their real-life situation. The study further concludes guidance, counselling, encouragement, motivation, threat and treatment, awareness raising, sharing stories, engaging students in different practical and project work etc. have been considered as the techniques to overcome classroom issues.

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