

Different Roles of Teachers in the ELT Classroom

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Abstract

This article explores the expected roles of language teachers in an ever-shifting English language teaching scenario. It introduces the traditional roles of language teachers and goes on to discover new roles evolved because of the new theories and innovations in this field. While analysing and interpreting, I reviewed the related literature on the concerned topic to review the roles of English language teachers in the language classroom. After the systematic thematic review of the literature, I, as part of the findings, concluded that the language teachers' roles are always evolving and bend towards consenting autonomy to the learners for providing them more control over their own learning. The roles assumed by the teachers are that of a facilitator, an assessor, a manager, a guide, a resource provider, a digital enthusiast, a cultural diplomat, and many others. A language teacher should be smart and flexible enough to morph into various roles as per the context and needs of the teaching-learning situation in the classroom. There is a continual need of exploring more plausible roles which can expedite language learning in more systematic and organized yet effective ways.

Keywords: Learners, Teacher Roles, Learning, English Language Classroom

Different Roles of Teachers in the ELT Classroom

Teaching anything is a sophisticated activity in itself. Furthermore, language teaching brings a few more challenges to teachers because of the complex nature of the language. To cope with such challenges, language teachers are expected to perform various roles that range from extreme authoritarian at one end to complete utopian autonomy for the learners at another end. Language teachers place themselves in between these two extremes and create several roles to fit as per the teaching-learning situation.

English Language Teaching in Nepal and Teacher Roles

The history of English language teaching in Nepal mainly consists of the last seven decades. It started when the English language education opened publicly in 1951 (Bista, 2011). However, English received its due place in Nepal's education system in recent decades only. At present, English has

become an indispensable part of life for Nepali people (Giri, 2015). Because of this, English teachers, now, receive extra privilege compared to the teachers of so-called 'less important' subjects. Unfortunately, despite these heightened prospects, the language teachers remain insufficiently supported by the work environment (Kubanyiova & Crookes, 2016) and proper resources. Despite such challenges, language teachers are expected to guide the teaching evolution, therefore, they must come out of the traditional stereotypes and evolve into the roles of flexible and dynamic teaching professionals.

Traditional Roles of English Language Teachers

The English language teachers have been playing several types of roles in the language classroom in the past and present. According to Wright (1987), traditionally, the teachers were '*all-powerful, all-knowing and exercising tight control*' over the learning and knowledge (as cited in Johnson et al., 1998, p. 2). The teachers' roles were of a controller, a prompter and organiser of all learning activities. A traditional role of a teacher is to control what happens in the classroom, to determine who says what and how the things happen in the classroom. Such a teacher assumes his/her work as 'transferer of knowledge'(Naibaho, 2019). Modern educationists and educators don't endorse such practices but, interestingly, some of the parents and language learners may expect such roles from the language teachers even in today's language classrooms.

Evolving Roles of English Language Teachers in Nepal's Perspectives

Generally, the education system expects teachers to create a meaningful context for effective language teaching because their smart decisions illuminate the class whereas a dull initiation can ruin it (Naibaho, 2019). That's why, Kumaravadivelu (2012, p. 10) points out a need to change teachers' role from traditional to more dynamic ones such as 'strategic thinkers, exploratory researchers and transformative intellectuals'. In a similar line, Yang (1998, p. 128) also mentions that "teachers are changing their traditional roles and moving to new ones". From the learners' perspective as well, the teachers needed to be alive and dynamic. Therefore, it is also important to raise language teachers' awareness of what type of role the learners expect from them (Lai et al., 2016).

Nepal's diverse and socio-cultural, economic, political realities demand an active and flexible role on the part of English language teachers. Within Nepal's small geography, 125 ethnicities and more than 123 languages survive and interact (Department of Information and Broadcasting, 2019). These social realities exert further challenge to the English teachers to teach English in Nepal as a foreign language to the children from the multilingual community. Furthermore, Bhattarai and Gautam (2005) observe that a teacher of English should be dynamic enough to cope up with the changing role of English in countries like Nepal. According to them, socio-cultural, linguistic, philosophical, pedagogical facets make the English language teaching an ever-changing phenomenon.

Therefore, to cope up with new challenges in language pedagogy, English teachers must be updated and should assume different roles. The roles may be of a facilitator, a guide, an assessor/evaluator, a manager, a resource provider, a digital instructor/learner, a cultural diplomat, and whatnot. Let's examine the possible roles of English language teachers in the English language classroom.

Language Teacher as a Facilitator

The long-held traditional belief that the teachers' role is to act as an 'authority' to transfer knowledge to the language learners has been criticised severely (O'dwyer, 2006). Language teachers' job is not just to hand-down the information but is to enable the learners to initiate their own learning style and pattern. The learners have to take the responsibility for their learning and teachers provide guidance and supervision without which the whole learning process will falter (Bajrami, 2015). There are several learning theories which demand language teachers to assume the role of a facilitator of learning. For example, Dewey's concept of 'learning by doing' is crucial to let the students learn by hands-on experience (English, 2016). Teachers who unnecessarily intervene the students may be ruining such 'hands-on' learning opportunities. Teachers' role as the facilitator will cease if the teachers try to dominate the classroom learning process (Ja, 2017). That's why many teachers fail to contribute to promoting the autonomy of language learners for successful language learning.

Language Teacher as a Guide

There is always a pitfall that any language teachers may fall into; they go either into two extremes: (i) complete freedom to the learners and (ii) total control over language learners. Both of these extremes are unfruitful for effective language learning. Therefore, teachers should conceive themselves guides who work on the path of language learning along with the learners instead of deciding a path for them (Golding, 2013). The teachers play the role like a 'tourist guide' and let their 'visitors' explore the phenomenon only assisting whenever there is some problem. Teacher as a guide gives learners a boost in the confidence and provides an opportunity to give their conscious efforts for their learning.

Language Teacher as an Assessor

A language teacher may be involved in both formative and summative assessments of learners' language proficiency. Language teachers may utilise formative assessment tools to review their techniques as well as the expected learning outcomes. On the other hand, the summative assessment provides language teachers feedback on the overall effectiveness of their language teaching. A language teacher is generally responsible for evaluating how well students are towards the mastery of language and their strengths and weaknesses (Johnson et al., 1998). This role also upsurges the responsibility of the teachers to take command of the goals of the learning and choosing methods and techniques to accomplish these goals. However, relying too much on teacher-initiated assessment may hamper the learner-oriented language learning process. Therefore, to develop the autonomy of the learners, self-assessment or peer assessment can be more suitable than the teacher-headed assessment of learning (Ja, 2017).

Language Teacher as a Manager

Teachers are one important aspect of the education system. A language teacher is a single-most contributory figure which carries immense responsibilities inside the classroom. That is why a teacher's roles are often labelled to the 'octopus metaphor'. In fact, teachers are the sole managers of classroom instructional systems (Johnson et al., 1998) because they are involved in managing the classroom set-up, seating arrangements, classroom activities, assessing the learning, and maintaining classroom ethics and conduct (Gujjar & Choudhry, 2009). While maintaining all these, a teacher must keep language learners motivated, engaged and empowered. Therefore, a language teacher plays the role of a good manager of classroom activities and student learning.

Language Teacher as a Resource Provider

The language classroom provides “a specialised kind of exposure to the language” (Bialystok, 1978, p. 71) and the teacher is the main agent of this delivery mechanism. The language teachers act in mainly two ways: (i) they point out towards useful resource materials for language learning and (ii) they act as a great source of language input themselves. The language teachers are responsible to provide useful web sites, worksheets, and other useful learning materials. The language learners view language teachers as a natural and obvious source of valid and authentic pieces of information whenever they are in doubt. To ensure the building up of the teacher-learner relationship and mutual trust, the accuracy of the information given should be acknowledged.

Language Teacher as a Digital Instructor/ Digital Learner

With an unprecedented expansion of information and communication technology, there is a dire need to keep oneself updated and ready for lifelong learning (Lai et al., 2016). Our language classrooms are being equipped with new electronic devices which will have a positive impact on the teaching and learning process. These innovations are most likely to alter the traditionally assumed roles of the language teachers. For example, chatbots are likely to change how we interact with the digital world utilising our existing language skills (Fryer et al., 2020) and social networking sites have immense effects on the lifestyle of both the language teachers and the learners. Lund et al. (2014, p. 283) suggest that professional digital competence should be focused on the teachers to develop future-oriented designs for teaching and learning. They point out the need for skills in both *generic* and *subject-specific* digital tools.

Teachers’ role as a digital practitioner is even more demanding in difficult times such as the current pandemic Covid-19. The UNESCO estimates that about 1.4 billion children, including 743 million girls are affected globally and in Nepal, all students are affected (Pandey, 2020) due to this pandemic. During this pandemic of Covid-19, a serious lack of digital literacy among the teachers was realised. This may be partly because of the lack of infrastructures of information communication technology. In Nepal’s context, the use of digital tools is increasing but at a slow and steady pace. As of fiscal year 2072/73, the population which had internet access is 44.4 per cent in Nepal (Department of Information and Broadcasting, 2019). Considering the fact, the efficacy of alternative delivery of education seems questionable provided that these facilities are more concentrated in urban areas only.

The computer-based language projects have positive impacts on teachers and learners to empower them in the language learning process (Lam & Lawrence, 2002). However, teachers should also be aware of the privacy and ethical issues in the use of digital tools and technology (Helleve et al., 2020) along with other security issues. The information and communication technology is evolving every day, therefore, a language teacher has to be a digital instructor as well as a digital learner to better integrate the digital tools into language learning and make the best use of it.

Language Teacher as a Cultural Diplomat

Teaching language more or less involves the teaching of the culture of the target language because culture and language are intricately related. Language teachers have to provide not only linguistic information of the target language but also socio-cultural aspects of it (Moutinho & Carlos Paes de Almeida Filho, 2015). Therefore, the language teachers are cultural diplomats, who will bridge the gap between two cultures, i.e. the target language culture and the learners’ native culture. Language

teachers must exhibit respect and interest in the learners' culture and also develop an acceptable attitude towards the target language culture which is necessary for language development. Similarly, there is also a need for developing a critical awareness of incorporating local socio-political issues into the English language classroom (Sharma & Phyak, 2017) which may also help to develop a positive attitude of the language learners towards the target language.

Findings/Conclusions

In today's time, the role of a teacher is to "create a free and open arena for all to explore, experiment, and work together" (Waterson, 2009, p. 4). All language teachers must understand that the learners have their own learning styles and the language teachers' role is to create a conducive environment for learning but should not dictate how it should happen. However, opting for a particular teacher's role may not always be straightforward. The teaching-learning situation may demand switching roles even in a single lesson. The teacher may need to play a role like that of 'an octopus' with several tasks put into action at the same time. For example, a language teacher may need to behave as a facilitator, a guide, and an assessor even within a single language activity.

An ideal language teacher's role is to guide and facilitate learning with sufficient resources with up-to-date knowledge of digital tools to manage the classroom activities as per the goals of the lesson. A language teacher is expected to show a sensitive and appreciative attitude to cultural issues of both target language culture and the learners' culture. Furthermore, such a teacher is also responsible for evaluating the learner's language proficiency as well as their own teaching styles. Therefore, the language teachers are required to take a smart and critical view of their roles and the effectiveness of them. A good language teacher is always ready to adapt to new roles that are more suitable in their context for the maximum benefit to the language learners and the language learning process along with their professional development.

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