



Sudurpaschim Spectrum

A Multidisciplinary, Peer Reviewed Journal

ISSN: 3021-9701 (Print)

Published by Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Far Western University, Mahendranagar, Nepal

Disparity, Empowerment and Female English Language Teacher in Higher Education Context in Bangladesh: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

The existing literature while highlighting learner empowerment, carefully gives less attention to the fact of empowering female teachers in adult English language teaching context. In most contexts worldwide teaching foreign languages is a feminine job (Ortiz & Serrano, 2020; Bashiruddin, 2018; Kollmayer et.al., 2020; Tindowen, 2019), and that mostly remains at a disadvantaged position as she works 'within a network of power relations'. Hence it is very essential to scrutinize and understand the micro-dynamics of the female teacher's journey of sense-making and her employment of coping strategies at the time and point of professional disempowerment. This in-depth narrative inquiry tries to investigate the issues that support a female teacher in empowering herself in professional landscapes. In this regard, I used the narrative inquiry research design and exploited semi-structured interviews with six female teachers to generate data to show how female teachers struggle(d) to achieve parity to empower themselves and their learners. Fraser's (2008; 2009; 2012) notion of 'participatory parity' was used here as the theoretical ground to analyze the findings that empowerment is a theory of social change. The result has come out with the view that any attempt at school reform should

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be synonymous with the most active models of female teacher empowerment to advance student achievement, collegiality, and professional learning. This study thus contributes to the empowerment literature of female English language teachers in the higher education context.

Keywords: Disparity, participatory parity, negotiation, structural inequity, social justice

Introduction

Female empowerment in education, especially in the EFL context is a less significantly developed area than its influence in other developmental enterprises (Stromquist, 2015). Although massive access of women to higher education, employment, and local government representation is visible, the scenario still echoes "...that women have to win power through struggle and are neither gifted nor achieve it 'naturally' through the process of economic growth and development" (Klasen and Pieters 2015; ILO 2017; Nazneen 2018).

Empowerment provides the physical as well as the psychological well-being of a female teacher in the EFL context. The recent growing interest in the psychological issues of EFL teachers about the psychology of FL learners (Dewaele, et al., 2017; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015) is an important ground of attention in the field of language teaching. Emotional well-being as an important element of the EI (emotional intelligence) trait of the female teacher helps her make positive attitudes toward the students. This study 'was linked to earlier studies where female teachers were found to have closer, less conflictual and less dependent relationships with students than male peers'. Her experience as an FL learner and enthusiasm to work harder gives her job satisfaction. However, empowerment helps her think as an important part of the decision-making, autonomous as she knows and adopts what is best for her classroom practices.

Researchers (İhtiyaroğlu, 2017; Altinkurt et al., 2016 in Hindiroğlu & TanriÖğen, 2021) claim that female teachers have a higher sensitivity to their psychological empowerment (meaning, effect, competence, and autonomy) in contrast to structural one (termed as knowledge, opportunity, resources, support, formal power and informal power). An integrated/holistic view of female teacher empowerment needs the coexistence of both types of empowerment. Lee and Nie (2014) classify empowerment into social-structural and psychological as external and internal power. One supports a teacher with administrative practices of school leadership, to 'professional development and performance improvement'. And internal strength highlights internal motivation, efficacy, confidence, and determination.

Perspectives on empowerment vary from one to another. Going beyond this framework of empowerment, researchers (Vahasantanen, 2015 as cited in Ganiban, Belecina & Ocampo Jr., 2019) emphasize recognition as an important constituent of institutional empowerment for a teacher. To them, recognizing one's needs, demands, performance, and objective performance assessment --are all about empowering them. These researchers found that any institution can work best if teachers' needs meet sufficient opportunities (financial and moral) to participate in decision-making, leadership, and in organizational activities. Another empowering perspective is communication and participation because it upholds 'the role of one another in the institution by sharing ideas, insights, and opinions regarding the welfare of the group (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013, in Ganiban, Melecina & Ocampo Jr., 2019).

In Bangladesh, the high employment rate among women in tertiary education is self-explanatory (Islam, 2015) about their choices of profession in the EFL context. In a developing world context, teaching is a respected profession and hence taken as empowering. As Bashiruddin (2018) reflects:

In the developed world context, the literature has a discussion on teacher empowerment, whereas, in the developing world context teachers are empowered in a different way: teaching is considered as a very respectable profession. ... On the other hand, the analysis of the narratives in the developing world context shows that respect for teachers is not connected with empowering teachers... respect for teachers was embedded in cultural traditions. ... The teachers feel empowered because they are respected (pp.157-158).

This matter of respect in a profession brings many young female individuals to this profession. Either to accept the expectation of society for young female graduates to take up the profession or for other various reasons-- safe and secure, and easy 'to carry out familial responsibilities along with the half day job', they choose this profession. After they enter into the teaching profession by chance or choice, their responsibilities and resilience then strongly get connected with different contexts along with the biographical and experiential spaces. Researchers have found six dimensions of teacher empowerment—decision making, autonomy, professional development, impact, status, and self-efficacy (Short & Rinehart, 1992, 1993, 1994; Enderson, 2004 cited in Bshiruddin, 2018). These lead to reaching the goal of learner achievement, school reforms, organizational learning, and in a broader sense 'the theoretical, the professional, and the personal' intermingling of the self and 'ways of being in the world'.

Transitions from becoming to being a teacher experience multiple perspectives and complexity around diverse lived experiences about curriculum planning, shaping learning and new knowledge, and manufacturing subjective thinking for education. A teacher's identity is not limited to a single definition, it rather continuously unfolds 'relationships, contexts, and experiences' that are multi-dimensional and ever-changing (Ovens et al., 2016). In the multiple identities of a teacher—as a counselor, a motivator, a mentor, a facilitator, a researcher she searches for her power from within with the capacity and confidence to undo the effects of internalized oppression to be recognized, reinterpreted, and redistributed with the wealth of equal participation (Calvès, 2009). So, this study aims to address the following research questions:

- Do female teachers have the opportunity to participate equally in their institution?
- How do female teachers' empowered selves act as active catalysts to influence their professional development?

In the formal institutional setting, teaching L2 is not a female teacher's only primary responsibility, she has to ensure the efficacy in all socioeconomic contexts to make her students capable of meeting the demands of the standard tests disregarding the standards, and backgrounds of the students sitting in front of her. Her job, inspiring her to be 'morally worthwhile to make a social contribution, and enhance social equity', may find her in a work environment where the loads quickly outweigh her personal and professional resources. Work-related stresses impact a teacher's personal satisfaction and professional life more than the issues related to classroom effectiveness (Mujtaba, 2013). Constant reforms in curriculum and educational enterprises, assessment systems, and the introduction of new technologies in institutions have brought about a changed work environment and work spiraling (Leithwood, 2007). If highly valued expectations and goals do not meet success in a particular school context and system, a female teacher's empowerment gets reduced along with her sense of attainment and competence (Khani & Mirzaee, 2015). Because "Becoming a teacher is an ongoing process that continues to change the very nature of what it means to be a teacher as circumstances shift and new connections are made" (Darling-Hammond, 2006b; Darling-Hammond, 2006a, 2006b; Zeichner, 2010, 2014, cited in Ovens et al., 2016).

These adaptation and collaborative opportunities give occasions for teachers for professional learning that potentially nurtures competence, a sense of belonging, and autonomy. As a female teacher's empowerment aligns with her psychological well-being, it is necessary to give attention to her emotional and motivational aspects of teaching that affect her pedagogical potential and pedagogical reasoning, organizational behavior, job satisfaction, student motivation and strengthening the social justice

she feels for her students ((İhtiyaroğlu, 2017; Altinkurt et.al., 2016 in Hindiroğlu & TanriÖğen, 2021; Fraser, 2008, 2009, 2012 cited in Chuback et al., 2016).

A female teacher's professional identity is discursively constructed and works within an unequal socio-cultural ground. This needs to be transformed into alternative, empowering discourses where she can invest significant personal involvement in forming herself 'unstable, dynamic, multiple, conflicting, unfixed and evolving' (Simon-Maeda, 2004; Dewaele et al., 2017).

Literature Review

Empowerment is a tool, a consciousness not a power

Empowerment through education is discussed in Paulo Freire's (1972/1986) seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* where he expresses the need to empower individuals. Powerless, disenfranchised people (women, learners, ethnic groups, and disabled) need to take control over their learning and develop a deeper understanding of their locus within a community through active involvement and participation. 'From a gender perspective, Freire's path to consciousness-raising is crucial for emancipation but so also is empowerment,' –this is raised through awareness of exploitation. To come out of the vicious circle of disempowerment, Freire emphasizes both formal and non-formal learning. Empowerment, an energizing motivational construct (Richardson & Watt, 2016; Hiver & Kim, 2018), can be achieved through experience as is used to develop self-efficacy-- a less visible than a felt one. It can start from the private, familial, and local to the broader aspects of the engagement of a woman.

Freire, (2004) portrays empowerment not as the provider of power but as an effective tool for influence and personal development (Panagiotopoulos et al, 2019). He mentioned that education is political and can never be neutral. It helps one either to domesticate or to liberate by engaging herself in the revisiting of the daily realities of her life. From his standpoint, the role of education is the engagement of the individual not as a question poser but as the problem poser to break the silence of the oppression. He gives a new dimension of learning and teaching in the horizontal relationships of them in a classroom to raise consciousness about social life a cause-effect undertaking not a taken for guaranteed one.

English language as a tool of empowerment

The empowerment narratives of different researchers (Mellita and Choli, 2012; Stromquist, 2014; Ortiz and Serrano, 2020; Bashiruddin, 2018) show that a female student makes choice on her own in studying and working in EFL context, although many others find it as discriminating fact of letting her choose the discipline than going

to the STEM disciplines (Moghe et.al, 2021; Kollmayer et.al, 2020). Anyway, the scenario of EFL female teachers in South Asian context says that they took it as the first step of empowerment (Esch, 2009; Roshid, 2018; Yagnik, 2012 Ahsan, 2009; Allana, 2009; SherAli, 2009; KasimAli, 2009; Hadwani, 2009 cited in Hussain et al., 2009). They have developed great insight into the issue of ‘how English empowers women’ – the disenfranchised population of the society. They claim that English unlocks the door to a better future academically, and professionally, especially for those who work in the higher education sector, ‘this would imply that English can be seen as a means of empowering the disempowered’.

As a language, English works as a symbolic tool to exercise the power of authority. In the creation of ‘cultural capital,’ this language plays a vital role in society. This capital comprises a set of skills, education, way of speaking, material as well as symbolic tools that society considers worthwhile to promote mobility and acceptability of a person (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Moreover, in many countries, English is perceived as the language of progress for individual and national success. It can help one in achieving her personal goals if one becomes aware of its importance as a tool to access knowledge, progress and further learning. In addition, learning a foreign language opens the horizon of people’s minds to receive various information available in that language. These new forms of knowledge bring benefits not only for the individuals but also for the society an individual lives.

Hussain et al. (2009) emphasize that people can control themselves as they participate in society through using and learning a foreign language. Thus, it helps one to be empowered by widening the opportunity for employability skills resulting in a content life. This, according to Norton (1995) is the idea of capital and intellectual investment that give an individual access to various forms of capital including linguistic, social, and cultural. Therefore, it develops one’s identity as she perceives her relationship with the world across time and space and understands her future possibilities with the language (Norton, 2013). Thus, language teaching and learning are viewed from diverse contexts rather than from taking it as a code of communication. Through critical language awareness, one can take control of using a language in multiple ways that take one to the ‘ownership’ of that language. This happens in many non-English-speaking developing countries where ‘English for development’ is frequently uttered in the polity and policy discourses (Roshid, 2018).

Empowerment refers to a changing consciousness

Although formal education, to many, has addressed the accumulation of knowledge for social progress and stability to produce workers to ensure jobs for women for economic growth, it has failed to give attention to gender-related issues. It has become

skeptical of this, as other priorities—globalization issues, and science-technological advancement have come forefront of the existing social knowledge and skills. The scenario very relevantly echoes Freire (1972) that the intention of the oppressor grounds in “changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them” (cited in Stromquist, 2015). A female teacher is thus positioned at the intersections of these discourses, though the nuances of her position have not been well explored (Morley, 2019). That’s the reason why:

Understandings of the meanings and mechanisms of women’s empowerment are of course not ‘merely’ matters of language and signification, but have real-world effects on women’s lives – on the power they can hold and use (Nazneen, Hossain & Chopra, 2019).

Thus, female teacher empowerment is not limited to ‘merely’ scholarly discourses and dispositions, it needs to highlight the real-life effects of the practices of the power to change the male-dominated scenario of human existence (Morley, 2019). The concept of empowerment is thus shown as a “spiral process, changing consciousness, identifying areas to target for change, planning strategies, acting for change, and analyzing actions and change” (Batliwala, 1994 in Stromquist, 2015). Feminist scholars across multiple disciplines emphasize empowerment as the rearrangement of power ‘and a process of action at individual, interpersonal, and collective levels’ (Nancy 1995, 2012; Batliwala 2007; Cornwall and Edwards 2014; Sardenberg 2016).

Any social arrangement can become empowering if it promotes ‘participatory parity in all aspects of social life’ (Fraser 2008, 2009, 2012). It can become the opposite, a disempowering one if it makes people stumble at every step to be a participatory parity. Overcoming this requires the dismantling of the complications that ‘prevent people from participating on a par with others, as full partners of social interactions’ (Fraser, 2008). In the search for the Holy Grail of fairness and equity in social interaction, Fraser distinguishes three dimensions—‘redistribution of rights, opportunities and resources (economic) and recognition (cultural) and representation (political)’ in contrast to the existing malpractices of these dimensions that hinder equal participation and female teacher empowerment. In achieving participatory parity, Fraser highlights the various complexities that need to be distinguished through analysis of ‘these three types of structural inequity—maldistribution, misrecognition and misrepresentation’ depicted as the disempowering agents. Fraser opines to critically make a distinction of these to understand how various disempowering dimensions function alone or mutually for an individual to mask the different routes of her empowerment.

Instead of outlining features of cultural identity as a sufficient manifestation of equality, one needs to widen the border of discursive resources beyond the current

understanding of empowerment to include greater receptiveness and accommodation of the political modes of expression—as Fraser opines in her theory of social justice in education (Chubbuck & Zembylas 2016). This research on that ground highlights other female EFL teacher empowerment criteria along with recognition, participation, and representation-- involvement fairness, clarity of purpose, attitude and behavior, improvement of working/employment conditions, proper communication, transparency, management in the workplace, and the removal of the stereotypes available in her surroundings.

Methodology

In this qualitative study, I have used narrative inquiry as the research design to describe the lived experiences and stories of the lives of the individuals. ‘People live storied lives. They tell stories to share their lives with others and to provide their accounts about classrooms, schools, educational issues, and the settings in which they work’ (Crasewell, 2012; Crasewell & Crasewell 2018). This helps the storyteller feel listened to, and valued. The stories unfold a rich site of personal experiences and specific insights of the teachers in the real school context. As a significant form of qualitative research, a narrative usually focuses on studying an individual, collecting data through a pool of stories, reporting, and discussing the significance of those experiences of the individual. This supports the researcher with an understanding of the inner or subjective thinking of the research participants and thus helps make a close bond between them and the researcher.

In education, narrative designs emerge from the recent increased attention to teacher reflection, teacher’s knowledge of professional development, and decision-making strategies. For educators, this research design helps ‘bring teachers’ voices to the forefront by empowering teachers to talk about their experiences’. For female teachers, these stories have encouraging educational values and thus often undertake a feminine repertoire to serve their female audiences with insights. TESOL researchers recognize this strategy at present as the feasible one to discover how ‘teachers construct their identities’. This strategy is striking to serious researchers to take account of female voices and other marginalized groups in academic discussions.

Methods

This research used semi-structured interviews for data collection collectively and individually as two participants showed interest in talking separately. Two interview sessions were conducted in groups of two participants to get a group or collective understanding of the matter of empowerment as they felt and analyzed. Some were expressed in the pen-paper format as the issue of empowerment was a very persuasive

criteria of the participants' aspiration. Interviews in the participants' L1 were translated, transcribed and digitally archived and the links were given in appendix: 1 by the researcher.

Participants

The participants were six female EFL teachers with different ages and expertise. They were postgraduate having national and international degrees and professional training. They were capable of performing their responsibilities with efficient practice. Their interaction with learners was positive and motivating for both. They believed in continuous professional development along with other professional success criteria. They were innovative, change makers and very influential in counseling learners, researching, and classroom management issues.

The six female participants EFL teachers of the research were from a private tertiary institute located in the urban area in the port city of Bangladesh. Their age groups are different, so the readers can find multiple perspectives of their narration of the empowerment discourses. Their professional development and commitment to continuous up-gradation of students' capacity development were significantly visible. They shared how they felt dis/empowered at certain points of their professional lives, how they redefined their empowerment perspectives, and eventually how they liked to spread that among their students.

The reasons behind choosing this team of research participants were just for their availability on the campus where the researcher also worked as a colleague to them, and following them was easy for the researcher to have a holistic view of them and their participation in the inquiry.

Data collection and analysis

To collect data, I tried to use the most convenient time for the participants. Sometimes, for data collection participants were taken away from the context, so that they could have given authentic reflections on their professional engagements, empowering and disempowering issues, and thoughts about these. In collecting the stories, I tried to give the impression that gender was one dynamic factor among many in human existence. This study maintained the narrative inquiry research design's three dimensions –space, time, and sociality. These terms refer to the temporal dimensions and matters, spatial and social interaction by engaging with the participants and their lived and living out stories of stories. The stories come from photographs, transcripts, and a particular feeling of the participants sharing the space with the researcher. A unique experience during data collection time, space, and interaction took place when a research Participant 6 (Shompa) expressed her opinion as a taxpayer to the government

which was empowering for her. Having and exercising the rights and duties of the local government made her happy and a dutiful citizen of the country—as an empowering factor this worked in her mind positively.

The collected data was analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and was transcribed and listed by using the pseudonyms--Sarah, Bony, Babo, Shehrin, Ziniya, and Shompa. One of the strengths of thematic analysis is flexibility which can be used to answer almost all types of research questions. Themes can be identified through either a data-driven top-down process or through a bottom-up way. Also, data can be interpreted in this analytical process from experiential to critical or to constructionist analysis that explains a particular phenomenon addressed in a study.

Results and discussion

The findings of the study have been organized into four major themes, which project a wholesome view of female teacher empowerment according to narrative inquiry's three-dimensional space from the interactional, temporal, and situational landscapes. Along with this space metaphor, Fraser's theory of 'participatory parity' and the research questions are integrated to generate and analyze data from the participants. These are arranged as sub-themes—a) empowerment narratives are time, space, and interaction-specific, b) Empowerment is raising questions against the stereotypes, c) Empowerment is participation, recognition, and voicing against the 'disframing', and d) role of empowerment for professional development.

Empowerment narratives are space, time, and interaction-bound

There is no single 'one size fits all' definition of empowerment; rather it is more subjective, autonomous, and time-context specific. In response to the question, 'Do you feel empowered in your organization?' Participants 1 and 2 (Sarah and Bony) displayed two opposite views. One's discontentment about her job and her strong standpoint on the issue that empowerment is not possible in the developing countries' context; it is available only in the West whereas other opined that her first lesson of empowerment started with her family. Her female elderly relatives as granny and aunts inspired her to be empowered in all aspects and phases of life. Not by taking reality as a taken for guaranteed phenomenon, participant 2 (Bony) took the lesson of contentment from her familial and social surroundings and thus became empowered through her self-initiation. To reply to the question 'What makes you empowered?', she shared that for her economic liberty was not the absolute thing to the female teacher empowerment but her decision-making capacities both in her public and private life made her empowered in a true sense.

Academic qualifications and professional dedication are strong sources of empowerment, but above all her participatory role helped her feel empowered. Handling students after the pandemic was becoming difficult for Participant 1 (Sarah), and their sudden drop-outs made her disempowered as office blamed her for her less engagement with the students created the situation. 'This is the most disempowering situation for me working in a private institution.' She claimed 'Teaching inside the classroom is one of my primary responsibilities and as long as I am happy with that, I think I am empowered that way. Because I am honest about that.'

Both the participants opined that this was their first 'open-up' session regarding their job and empowering issues. This helped them feel empowered as they could share their reflections on this issue and thus, they thought they could help others think about this.

As teaching is now more a job of negotiation than it had been earlier, female teachers have to relocate themselves in several contexts of education i.e. counseling, guiding, mentoring, and supporting the academic needs of both the male and female students and also the married female students with different social and familial needs. They suffer from challenges in meeting exam deadlines and other issues and they feel comfortable sharing and solving the problem with the help of the female teachers. Also, in an inclusive classroom, a female teacher has to address other special needs students. About handling female students' behavior and manners in/outside the classroom, female teachers have to interfere and make the situation positive for both. 'Experiences and professional dedication can make one empowered' as opined by Participant 1 (Sarah) in her dialogue. She claimed that the lesson of empowerment should be given to the girls at the very beginning of their life so that they can find that as a process of self-development not one to make the end point of the journey, a product by itself.

Empowerment is raising questions against the stereotypes

Raising voices about one's position and existence in a professional context is another important reflection that Participant 5 (Zinya) made in her empowerment narratives. By criticizing the existing social practices toward a 'married woman as an empowered one', she resented the stereotyped characteristics of her workplace. Society and her institution bore the idea that her husband's identity was her first step to empowerment which she criticized as the nuances of the society and the man-made institutions that say that her husband's identity and money is the symbol of her empowerment. But she commented that she contributed to the GDP of the country and paid taxes to the government, then how she can't make her definition of empowerment on her own.

The unpredictable voice made by her about the disempowerment of her male colleagues who despite having all good qualities made her stand in front of a microphone to anchor all types of programs in the institution. Also, her male colleagues have so far given their female colleagues all responsibilities of arranging the extra-curricular activities/programs on the campus as if it were the female teachers' territory. As a female teacher negotiating and renegotiating her identity, according to her, was a continuous process and she suggested that all should try to adapt to this process of negotiation.

'In what way do you think your empowered self helps you develop professionally?' To reply to this Participants 5, and 6 (Zinya and Shoma) opined that 'when my students in a large classroom follow my lessons and give feedback accordingly, I feel empowered and at the same time, I want to devise some techniques to make them more interactive and involved with the lesson, like group work, role-play, group presentation. These support my professional self as my office does not interfere with my pedagogical practices but I introduce innovation in my own way to reach more students and to influence and enhance my professional capability.'

Empowerment is participation, recognition, and voicing against the 'disframing'

In response to the research question one about female teachers' equal participation in their institution, participants shared their mixed feelings on the issue. One's self-realization of understanding and recognizing of her capability is the first step to feeling empowered and it needs to be spread among others to female and male students to challenge the stereotyped attitude of the society. Participant 3 (Babo) has shared her experience of disempowerment and how from the beginning of her professional life, she made her definition of empowerment and spread that to all her students coming in contact with her. 'Previously when we asked questions our teachers ignored us; but this makes me feel empowered when my students ask questions and disagree with my opinion. I encourage diversity of opinion and thinking and it makes me happy that my students are following me and giving their voices; not taking everything "as guaranteed" things.' A female teacher's participation in organizational decision-making is important and at the same time listening to students' voices is important for an institution.

To Participant 6 (Shoma), her female EFL teacher identity is empowering and helps her support her family as well as her psychological self as an independent thinker-doer in her professional context, research engagement, and in the broader sense in her involvement in the capacity development of her students. 'I have to negotiate with the several roles that I play in my public and private life, but I don't like to make conflict between those.' She shared her views of empowerment as having the capacity and courage to unleash the inhibited mind to think, speak, and act responsibly. She

opined that her income and her education both are empowering for her along with her recognition of herself as an ‘able–capable’ one.

As a female teacher, seeking any privilege is disempowering to her and a dishonor to one’s self-respect, as she mentioned. ‘What makes you disempowered?’ --‘When I am misunderstood and stereotypically judged, behaved verbally and non-verbally by others.’—replied Participants 6, 4, and 5 (Shoma, Shehrin, and Zinya). ‘As a female teacher I never sought any privilege, but my female students ask for that, this makes me unhappy and at the same time feel pity for her. Even for any critical incident happening on campus, like a student cheating in the exam hall, and if any female teacher can trace that, she is criticized by all, especially by the student and her parents. Isn’t it disempowering and unethical for a student? As a female teacher, I have to negotiate sometimes my ethical sense with theirs’.

The participatory parity (Fraser, 2008, 2009, 2012) that female teachers seek as equal members of their institution needs to address several issues. Participation without accommodating their voices, and recognizing their presence without valuing them can’t make them empowered. It needs more accommodation of her psychological spaces, and mental well-being as an independent identity, which can be ensured as her participation is equally valued, and her contribution equally assessed. Going beyond the traditional confinement and dilemmas needs an extension of the scopes that support a female teacher to flourish and empower herself most practically. Fraser advocates for a post-Westphalian framing in both national and global contexts to address the ‘misframed’ that was taught and learned as a colonial legacy. The contextual definition of empowerment is emphasized without following the Anglo-Saxon way of defining the reality of the non-Anglo-Saxon (Slimani-Ross, 2022).

Role of empowerment for female teachers’ professional development

A female EFL teacher’s participation, recognition, and representation of her values and norms along with other empowerment criteria of clarity, transparency, and involvement in the leadership process ensure her position and contribution to her professional organization in a positive professional landscape. Some obstacles obstruct her to not achieving but possessing this, as Participant 5 (Zinya) mentioned in her dialogues, ‘empowerment one possesses not achieves.’ From her viewpoint, her empowered self was that in her family, as a female child, she did not feel any challenge (although in many cases it was not the same in a developing country’s context) of becoming what she wanted to study, to become what she wanted to be. And now she is a female EFL teacher, an expected popular identity that society wants from a female

member. But regarding her professional self, her society's ideological position 'teaching is not a very serious type of profession, it does not have as many stresses as other professions do'—makes her feel disempowered. The traditional picture of the profession is not supportive of the present workload that a female teacher has to undergo with the profession:

A female teacher's workload is double than that of a male teacher, as everybody is aware of that, and while working outside, society takes that any female teacher's job outside is a light thing as teaching is taken as a part-time job. So, while balancing the private and public sometimes comments come to us that my income is extra and it does not come to any use in the GDP or other things, but I give taxes, I support my family and how can they comment like this, I do not know. Situations become more disempowering when they say 'Your husband is very rich, why doesn't he buy a car for you to come to the campus comfortably?' But they do not understand that I can buy that, why should I depend on my husband to purchase that? Sometimes male colleagues say 'I wish I had a husband like you do'—as he is an umbrella over my head, they also want someone who could support them as husbands support wives in a traditional way of the system of society—Participant 6 (Shoma).

She said she was trying to break these traditional ideologies and become successful in doing so. In challenging the stereotypes, one needs the courage to face and fight them and it can never be achieved unless all surrounding a female teacher supports her to change the scenario. Sometimes, her male colleagues become disempowered when they impose on her any work a female's type like anchoring in a program or arranging cultural programs, as if they do not know how to arrange or conduct them. To her empowerment is not a product one can buy it or interact with, rather it is a psychological position that one feels and shares with others she comes in contact with. Possessing this will become challenging unless one has support from colleagues, institutions, family, and others with whom one is connected and attached.

Conclusion

Guided by the narrative technique (Crasewell, 2012; Crasewell & Crasewell, 2018), and Fraser's 'participatory parity', this study explored female teacher empowerment in EFL contexts, their subjective and negotiated definition of that, their participation, recognition, and involvement with the organization in possessing that, their subjective discourses of empowerment that influences their professional development and their facing challenges and constraints to possess that in their contextual setting.

The research participants were six female EFL teachers whose primary narrations reflect their ways of understanding their empowered and disempowered position in their professional setting of higher education institutions. Their engagement with the students inside the classroom, students' success, making students interact in ensuring learning outcomes, the criticality of their understanding and positions, their role modeling aspects for students, students' positive feedback to pedagogical methods-innovations—all these pedagogical issues and their effects on the students have made teachers empowered. At the same time the institutional intervention, the fear of being 'misframed', and the socio-cultural setups, as the narrations document, disempower a female teacher in her professional context.

These participants narrated their position from different perspectives as daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, and mother, as they toiled to come out from the disempowering to the empowering one by pursuing higher studies, creating awareness of the areas that created subjugation for them. Their backgrounds affected their professional learning contexts and helped them realize their more supportive roles to the students to make them empowered and consciousness raiser of their disempowered situation. They believed that empowerment is not a single process of a single self-development but a collective process that needs to address others in the journey of attainment. Participants' realization supported this research in an extraordinary way to open new avenues in this area.

Another unprecedented experience and insight that the research has had was discovering and reflecting on the disempowering facts of the male teachers. Although equipped with extraordinary caliber of presentation skills, male colleagues pushed their female counterparts to host any program or arrange any cultural event in the institutions as if that part was a female teacher-dominated one.

In most cases female teachers' emphasis on participatory roles at the micro level makes them feel empowered, but their participation in the broader context of the institution, and community development is not done in the expected participatory way. So, participation parity is not properly rather selectively maintained. There are some limitations in participating in the broader context of the decision-making steps that are still male-dominated:

Therefore, it is important to examine the micro-dynamics of the myriad meaning-making and coping strategies that women of various backgrounds employ when confronted with professional disempowerment (Simon-Maeda, 2004).

A female teacher's professional identity is an evolving phenomenon that corresponds within her particular context with 'an unavoidable relationship between

personal and professional identities' (Bashiruddin, 2018). Her professional development is mostly 'sporadic' and 'interrupted' and she never strives to seek developing opportunities but only when it comes by. She must come out from these through proper teacher education which is scarce in a developing world context, very few opportunities are here for formal professional development for teachers (Bashiruddin, 2011a; Dayoub & Basiruddin, 2012; Nasiruddin, 2016, cited in Bashiruddin, 2018).

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Appendix

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1q7jVEQ1s10dT6b-eo9NegxoQkFZOWex0/view?usp=sharing>

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/18tMkwqVv9vOJMKYL7eXRdpcCAU4ATDEB/view?usp=sharing>