

## **Translingual Writing: A Transformative Classroom Strategy in Multilingual Classroom of Nepal**

**Debraj Karki**

**Lecturer, Bright Future College, Lalitpur, Nepal**

[karkidr2016@gmail.com](mailto:karkidr2016@gmail.com)

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### **Abstract**

Nepal is a linguistically and culturally diverse nation with 124 languages spoken by 142 ethnic nationalities (Central Bureau Statistics [CBS], 2021). Such diversity is the asset and beauty of a school classroom. The study aims at exploring the teachers' and students' experience of translingual writing in multilingual classroom in community school of Nepal. Similarly, it investigates the improvements and impacts of translingual writing in the community school of Nepal. The study has used a critical paradigm to interrogate the existing monolingual pedagogy in the multilingual classrooms. Exploratory Action Research (EAR) has been used as a research design to understand and improve classroom practices. The study has chosen a community school in Lalitpur district as the site of study. Focus group discussion, informal talks, and writing diaries are the tools of data collection. I have used translingual writing strategy with "my family theme" for the practices of writing skill. The study found that translingual writing has risen to substitute the existing conventional monolingual pedagogy. Similarly, the study found active participation when they are engaged in writing from their prior experiences of knowledge. The study has recommended considering translinguaging and plurilingual instruction as the main classroom tools to enhance English language proficiency.

**Keywords:** Exploratory action research, Monolingual pedagogy, Multi-lingual classroom, Transformative strategy, Translingual writing

## **Introduction**

Nepal is a linguistically and culturally diverse nation where 124 languages are spoken as ‘mother tongues’ by 142 ethnic nationalities (CBS, 2021). Out of all other languages, the majority of people (44.86%) speak Nepali as their ‘mother tongue, 11.05% of them speak Maithili, (6.24%) Bhojpuri, (5.88%) Tharu and (4.88%) of them speak Tamang language. The languages with less than (5%) speakers include, Newar (2.96%), Bajika (3.89%), Magar (2.78%), Doteli (1.7%), Urdu (2.61%) Avadhi (1.89%), Limbu (1.29%), Gurung (1.22%) and Baitadeli (1.02%) (CBS,2021). To be specific, the English language remains on the 76<sup>th</sup> position as spoken by 0.01% people of the total population of the country (CBS, 2021). The corpus clearly indicates the linguistic, ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of the Nepalese society which is also reflected in the schools’ classrooms that they are also becoming more linguistically and culturally diverse. Such diversity in educational institutions is a common phenomenon in the Nepalese community due to the social structure and organization from a very primitive time.

Although these linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms call for pedagogical activities that build on learners' linguistic and cultural resources to support their language learning, the dominant languages, such as Nepali or English, are predominantly used as the medium of instruction in schools to instruct students from such diverse backgrounds. The languages that school’s children speak as their mother tongues have not been incorporated in the classroom either as the medium of instruction or as a subject. Consequently, the resources of the student’s home languages are deliberately restricted in the English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms instead of deploying them in the meaning-making process. This indicates that Nepalese schools’ children are compelled to experience unwelcoming learning situation due to the imposition of the dominant languages in classroom as the medium of instruction which also perpetuates linguistically and culturally bias instruction in the EFL contexts.

Considering the linguistic and cultural diversity of multilingual classroom, English language teaching has been a hot topic of debate and discussion in the academic institutions of Nepal. English language has been prescribed as a compulsory subject for teaching in school education. Nepal government, Ministry of Education (MoE), has started teaching English as compulsory subject from grade 1 since 2003. It has been taken as the language to participate in classroom interaction, study course materials, reading things for pleasure and to gain access to the world body of knowledge Basic Level (1-3) Curriculum, (2019). In this regard, Dearden (2014) states English language teaching from early grades contributes to improving English language proficiency. The earlier we start to learn English the better we acquire it. However, teaching English from a very early stage is not the one and only way of improving English language proficiency. My more than a decade-long experience teaching English has not shown positive results of teaching English from the early grade of teaching. Instead, the first and most significant part of learning a language is the status of learners. In the context of Nepal, the learners in English classrooms belong to different linguistic, social, and cultural backgrounds. The students in my school come from multiple ethnicities. They have different mother tongues, such as Tamang, Newwar, Maithili, Bhojpuri, etc. In such linguistic and culturally diversified classrooms, teachers should be aware of using students' prior knowledge as the main source of classroom instruction. Addressing such diversity, the study aims at exploring the teachers' and students' experiences in multilingual classrooms. Similarly, the study further investigates the impacts of translingual writing in the multilingual classroom of community schools in Nepal in general and to explore teachers' and students' experiences in translingual writing in multilingual classroom of Nepal and to uncover the impacts of translingual writing in multilingual classroom in particular.

### **Translingual Pedagogy**

Translanguaging is a meaning-making process through functionally grounded hybrid and fluid language practices (Phyak, 2018) and translanguaging pedagogy refers to building on bilingual students' language practices flexibly to develop new understandings and

new language practices including those deemed academic standard practices (García, & Wei, 2014). Translanguaging pedagogy can best work to teach English in linguistically diversified classrooms. Translanguaging in English language classes does not merely refer to the use of L1 but also recognizes students' existing total linguistic knowledge as a resource to learn a weaker language (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). It not only helps to learn a weaker language but also facilitates to have a good academic achievement. It increases students' competence in their additional language and makes them more skilled academically (Beres, 2015). It is also important for language minority students because it builds on students' linguistic strengths and reduces the risk of alienation at school by incorporating language and cultural references familiar to language minority students (García & Wei, 2014).

In a study Phyak (2018) found that translanguaging is used for breaking students' silence, increased student classroom participation and teaching academic content. This study reveals that the use of translanguaging pedagogy in EFL classes gives strengths for classroom participation to the students who hesitate to speak due to their lack of linguistic knowledge in English. The classroom participation makes them learn the subject matter taught and increase their academic performance. Similarly, Garcia, Johnson and Seltzer (2017) identify four purposes for the strategic use of translanguaging in education: a) supporting students as they engage with and comprehend complex content and texts; b) providing opportunities for students to develop linguistic practices for academic contexts; c) making space for students' bilingualism and ways of knowing; and d) supporting students' bilingual identities and socioemotional development.

This discussion shows that translanguaging pedagogy helps students to perform well in their study on one hand and helps teachers promote mother tongue of the students along with developing their second language (here English). Wei(2018) writes, "Translanguaging has proven to be an effective pedagogical practice in a variety of educational contexts where the school language or the language-of-instruction is different from the languages of the learners" (p.15). This implies that EFL teachers should use translanguaging pedagogy for effective English language teaching in

multilingual classrooms.

### **Methods**

The study has been guided by the notion of critical paradigm which aims at creating critical consciousness with a vision of better classroom. Similarly, the study has used exploratory action research as the design of the study. EAR is a action – oriented research to understand the dynamic and innovative nature of classroom activities. The data has been collected from the grade nine students of a community school with Focus Group Discussion (FGD), informal talks, writing diaries, and memos. The data has been collected mostly in three phases: exploration, intervention and post – exploration phase.

### **Translingual writing**

Translingual writing is a pedagogical approach which invites students coming from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to acknowledge and negotiate the various languages in writing. The approach views linguistic differences in student texts as a valuable resource. Students develop English writing skills by using their home languages in different phases of writing. I have applied the strategy in four themes of writing. They have been systematically implemented in the following section.

### **Theme: My Family**

#### **Generating ideas**

This is the first five days tasks of writing for my students. The primary purpose of this activity is to generate ideas on the given topic. I asked them to write about their family. It was entirely personalized writing which is comfortable for them to write. In order to facilitate the writing, I gave them some prompts such as: introduction (your name, number of family, their name and profession), your likes and dislikes, things you want to change in society and your future. They felt comfortable to write when they were given these prompts. Similarly, I told them to write as much as you can by talking to their family members and no worries about the language you write. I focus on ideas and then the language. It made them more comfortable to generate ideas on the topic. I visited around the class day by day to facilitate and continue their writing.

### **Organizing ideas**

Here we discussed the ideas of my students one by one by dividing the total students in four days' period. All of them were so excited to show and narrate their stories in the class. They felt free and comfortable to generate ideas. Then, I asked them to list and organize the ideas according to the languages and terms they used in that language. Similarly, I asked them to look for the words in English by using a dictionary and asking friends and teachers. They are gradually enhancing their English language proficiency in writing. We mostly worked on the process of writing based on topic sentences and supporting details. It shaped and developed coherence in writing. Then I asked them to prepare a small book about them the next day.

### **Working and reworking the ideas**

This is the third phase of writing skills. Students have strong content for writing. They have focused on revising the content, vocabulary, and grammar of the writing. Students are working hard to discuss and interact with their friends and teachers to prepare for the final part of writing. This is the time consuming phase than other phases of writing. Students consult multilingual dictionaries and grammar for the final product of writing.

#### **Final product of writing**

It is the day of the product. I found all the students to be happy and fun. They are in class with their changing identity. They have been titled as authors by students. It has been a drastic change and transformation in my students. I also personally realized that translanguaging pedagogy purposefully and meaningfully brings change and transformation in English language teaching, particularly in multilingual classrooms.

### **My observation and reflection**

This is the stage of seeing what happens with the data. I observed the effects of intervention systematically. Similarly, I collected students' experiences in terms of contexts, actions, and opinions regarding intervention strategies. As I experienced that students were fun and interactive with the activity. However, they were not fully confident that they would learn English from this type of writing practices. I realized this is due to the hegemonic impact of conventional monolingual pedagogy. Therefore, this

new strategy has been an eye and mind-opening tool for developing writing skills in multilingual classrooms.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Interrogating the Existing Conventional Monolingual Pedagogy**

Transformative pedagogy is commonly defined as a critical perspective on the existing practice of classroom instruction. It aims at exploring classroom pedagogy from multiple perspectives. Mezirow (2002) states that transformative pedagogy develops critical thinking to the existing practices. It is teaching for equity and diversity to improve social evils. The teacher primarily focuses on teaching sociocultural issues to raise awareness of social ills. It assumes that an individual is someone who is always in constant transformation. In this context, Plurilingual/ translingual instruction is one of the critical transformative pedagogies which raise questions on conventional monolingual pedagogy in English classrooms and examines English language teaching from students' prior knowledge as a central foundation of classroom instruction. It reiterates students' home language as a main source of classroom teaching. Students admit to school with a great deal of ideas and experiences. They are eager to share experiences in front of teachers and friends. When their experiences are properly addressed, they can generate innovative ideas to cope with any sort of challenges in their life. When teachers empower students to recognize their potentialities, they are able to transform their cognition, attitude, and skills in learning.

English language teaching, however, has not assumed and easily accepted such transformative pedagogy. Instead, it has been undergoing from conventional monolingual ideology. It assumes that students are the blank sheet of paper. A language teacher begins to fill on the sheet according to his personal intuition and the prescribed curriculum and the course of study. Such kind of pedagogy is termed as banking model of education (Freire, 1997, 2000). In such pedagogy, the teacher bestows knowledge as a gift to students. Students are the depositories of knowledge and teachers are the depositors. When school education is manipulated by such ideology, innovation,

creativity, and originality are lost, and learners are always the disciples of others. It creates hierarchies in many aspects of students' life such as in profession, social and ritual activities and specifically in his personal life. Therefore, concerned stakeholders, experts, and academic practitioners should examine this issue seriously. Regarding this context, Meena (nickname) of participant states

*English bhannebittikai malai ekdamaidarlagthiyo. Jaba teacher le English ma writing gar bhannuhunthiyo, malai kelakhne, kelakhnejastohunthiyo. Malai lagthiyo ki mero mind nai blank bhayo. Ani ma kehipani lekhna sakdinathiye. Jaba English panimero first language, nepali language bata siknasakinxawa ideas mother tongue ma generate garera finally English jannasakinchhabhannetha paya. Yokurolemero English partikosoch (perception) change bhayako xa. Malia purnabiswaschha ki ma English ma writing garnasakchhu.[ I am really frightened with English. I am blank when teacher asks me to write in English. I couldn't write even a word. However, when I knew that my mother tongue gives the basic knowledge for learning english, I became confident. It changed my thought and I am now fully confident that I can write in English in future].*

The data suggest that conventional monolingual pedagogy in English classroom has been killing the creative potentialities of learners. Instead of imparting quality and skill-based education, it has been producing passive learners who cannot dare to raise voice in any sorts of injustices prevailing inside and outside the classroom. When students feel frightened to write in English, how can they share problems with teachers? How can they improve their pace of learning? It takes them into dilemma about what to write in English. How to start English writing? Freire (2000) argues that concerned academic practitioners have been ignoring that students come to class with so much knowledge, and teachers have to facilitate that knowledge with new ideas and concepts. Teachers have to clarify that English writing is purposeful and process-oriented, which begins to generate ideas from your prior experiences. Such kind of counseling can transform the perception of students towards English. The idea indicates that translingual / plurilingual



pedagogy which focuses on students' home language creates creative and constructive environment in the classroom. A language teacher should apply this sort of pedagogy in the multilingual classroom. Similarly, it "plays significant role to engage students in terms of their prior knowledge" (Bransford et al. 2000). It further integrates facts of learners into a conceptual framework and takes active control of the process of learning.

### **Active Participation of Students in Learning Activities**

In order to create active participation of all students in classroom activities, translingual and plurilingual activities play a significant role. Regarding this context, Sikha asserts

*"mailemero feelings haruramrari share garneabsarpayako xu. Plurilingual pedagogy bata English language learning garda sabaijana sathiharu actively siknatayar bhayako pani payako xu. Tesale malai yo English siknetarika man paryo."* [I have shared my feelings properly. All friends have actively participated to learn English from plurilingual instruction. So, I love this strategy for learning English].

The data suggest that translingual pedagogy has created proper space among learners for learning the English language. It further emphasizes that this pedagogy has motivated and encouraged learners to initiate learning from the prior knowledge which they have. They have got ample opportunities to interact with friends. With prolonged discussion, they come to teachers with innovative ideas which shift conventional pedagogy to learner-based pedagogy. In this context, Andrade (2009) calls it as creating space to evaluate learners' previous knowledge. The more learners get space to cultivate their learning in groups, the better they create new knowledge. It also encourages learners to examine and cope with the learning problems critically. One of the fundamental purposes of educating students is to examine life challenges seriously and solve them critically. Another essential support of Andrade is that such pedagogy prepares students for language use in social contexts. When learners are able to associate classroom knowledge with their family and society, it becomes language learning as a life-long

process of development. When learners feel comfortable sharing their school knowledge in their family and society and when they get support, they also begin to participate in social activities. It systematically and naturally transforms learners' into members of society.

Another contribution of plurilingual / translingual pedagogy is creating a Participatory learning space in the classrooms. It creates ample opportunities for all students to engage in learning activities. All individuals are different in terms of their learning pace, comprehension level and classroom participation. They have unique tendencies and multiple competencies to comprehend the text. Conventional monolingual pedagogy does not prioritize such diversity in the classrooms. It basically compartmentalizes languages and ignores the prior knowledge of learners (Council of Europe, 2007). When learners are deviated from their foundation of learning, they feel monotonous in the classroom activities. In order to cope with this serious concern, a language teacher should inform, transform, and reform his pedagogical stance. In this context, one of my research participants, Gaurab states;

*malai English Bisaya kasarisikne bhanne kuro le sataira heko hunthiyo. Ma ta English kahilipanisiknasakdinaholabhanne lagthiyo, khasgare i English to English padhaudakherikasari English janixabhanne jastolagthiyo. Tara jabamaile English learning ma mother tongue (nepali) bhas bata process based tarikalesiknathale, tespaximaiai English sikna interest lagyo. Kahsgarimaile English sikne process thaha paya. Last ma maile ma ramero family ko barema English ma sano book tayargare. Aile English subject parti mero thought change bhako xa. English panisajilotarikalesiknasakinxabhannemahasusbhayakochha. [ I was always worried to learn English. I used to think that I never learn english. I did not understand what the teacher is telling in english. But translingual writing has changed my concept. I became interested in English. I knew the processes of learning english from my mother tongue. Then I began to write in English. Finally I have produced a small booklet in English on the title my family.]*

Gaurab's statements indicate that conventional monolingual pedagogy has created confusion among students about how to learn and improve English language competency. It provides no space and process among learners. They just attend in the classroom but cannot explicate what they have achieved from the classroom activities. They feel hesitant to share their learning experiences if we ask them what you learned in your English class. Considering this issue, Government of Nepal has prioritized mother tongue-based education up to the basic level of education. The main objective of this education is to create a creative learning space among diversified learners and foster learning outcomes. Council of Europe (2007) calls this as the process of cultivating the linguistic repertoire of learners and engages them in prior knowledge and lived experiences. It is widely believed that the more students are activated, engaged, and participated in learning activities, the better they enhance and foster their inner potentialities. In order to cultivate linguistic repertoire, teachers have to emphasize language synthesis: code-switching, code, mixing (Piccardo, 2013), and translanguaging in multilingual classrooms. It is called freedom of expression on academic issues and problems.

### **Conclusions**

The study has analyzed the use of translingual writing in the multilingual classrooms from teachers' and learners' experiences. The researcher has created a series of writing activities in a multilingual classroom. In multilingual countries like Nepal, language education is a contested issue (Liddicot, 2007). The use of dominant language is "hegemonic" (Phillipson, 1992) because it often deprives the students' home languages in classroom learning activities. Adopting the critical language policy (Tollefson, 1991) for the analysis of the study, this study attempts to explore and unpack teachers' plurilingual teaching experience with constructing and implementing translingual writing series in grade nine students and students' language learning experience from plurilingual or translingual pedagogical perspectives.

Regarding teacher (researcher) teaching experience, it has been found that plurilingual instruction in multilingual classroom is one of the resourceful and transformative classroom tools in multilingual classroom. It has created interactive and collaborative learning spaces among learners. I personally realized that this plurilingual instruction has been the source of classroom in terms of content and pedagogical stance. Learners explore and share their experiences in relation to the thematic issue of the class. Then I felt comfortable designing classroom strategies in terms of their experiences then proceed my language teaching.

So far as the concern of learners learning experiences, they have actively participated in classroom activities and constructed a book in their life. It indicates that such pedagogy empowers learners' autonomy and there is a great chance of constructing knowledge according to the level of learners. Instead of conventional monolingual pedagogy, plurilingual/translingual pedagogy empowers both teachers and learners respecting their local knowledge identity in front of friends and in their community as well.

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