

# Issues of Teaching English In The Classroom of Heterogeneous Students : A Case Study

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## Abstract

Issues of teaching English in the classroom of heterogeneous students is a case study. The main purpose of this study is to find the perception of students and teachers towards the heterogeneous class and to publish the data obtained through this research. The narrative research methodology supported with discourse analysis is used as the research methods of this study. Both primary and secondary data are used for this study. Interview with individuals, focus group discussion and some classroom observation are used as the data collection tools. 15 teachers and 15 students are the participants of this study. Being Narrative Research, the collected data is analysed descriptively. The conclusion reveals that all the classes are heterogeneous and the teachers have to manage everything tactfully to address the needs of the students and manage the classroom.

**Keywords:** *heterogeneous, narrative research, discourse analysis, tactfully*

## Introduction

Heterogeneous students are the different colourful flowers of the garden and the teachers have to manage them into a beautiful garland. Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary defined Heterogeneous as consisting of many, different kinds of people or things. The word 'heterogeneous' means not same or similar with others. Different scholars have defined and treated heterogeneous classes in different ways. Mill road (2002) considered heterogeneous classes as the combination of successful and unsuccessful learners and believes that the symmetry of needs of "whole class of individuals" should be met sufficiently. A heterogeneous class is one that has different kinds of learners as opposed to homogeneous class, where learners are similar. It refers to multi-cultural, multi lingual, multi ethical, multi casts, and different family backgrounds and geography possessing students.

The above-mentioned view, say that heterogeneous classroom is one that reflects the rich diversity of the students. Where students are different with

each other, they have individual differences. They are different in language, culture, attitude and intelligence. In this mix ability of class teaching is challenging job. How many teachers are aware of this condition of class, this is very curiosity for us. The main purpose of this study is to find out the issues of teaching learning activities in the classroom of heterogeneous students.

## Problems of Teaching in Heterogeneous Classroom

In heterogeneous class there are 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' learners. To teach such class, teacher faces technical difficulties like: level of instruction, language, culture and how different groups relate to with other. To support this, Skehan (1998) says, "A heterogeneous class consisting of 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' learners is a challenge for teachers. One of the suggested ways to teach such a class is by using in class task adaptation". There are individual differences among the learners. No two learners can learn in the similar ways. Therefore, a teacher has to think for each and every student individually. No

any school in the world can provide every individual student a separate teacher. Because of this reason a teacher must have the enough information for handling all the students.

Nepal is multilingual and multicultural country. Therefore, In the case of Nepal there is a great difficulty to teach the heterogeneous class. How a teacher teaches to such types of class is of curiosity for us, undoubtedly, teaching in heterogeneous classes is more problematic and demanding for the English teachers. Regarding this, Hess (2006, p.2) also states that “Teaching in these classes is more exhausting and infinitely more demanding”. Therefore, heterogeneous class is taken as problematic by many English language teachers. Harmer (2008) expresses that:

*Any teachers are extremely worried about the fact that they have student in their classes who are at different level of proficiency. Indeed mixed-ability classes are a major preoccupation for most of us because they appear to make planning and the execution of plans in lessons- extremely difficult (p.127).*

Thus, it is clear that diverse classes bring about many problems to teachers. The most crucial problems of such classes are deciding appropriate level of instruction and ensuring effective learning for all. The literatures have informed about the different issues related with the heterogeneous classes and suggested the solutions to handle such classes. The teachers were found more discipline seeking and less child friendly as well as the use of Informal communication Technology is very less. The main gap is that the teachers have to change the trend of teaching English. we should not miss the virtual classes as it is the call of time and many students are hanging at the social media that’s why the use of social media in facilitating class can also be useful in the present-day classes.

The students need more visual, interactive, and ICT based classes but teachers are not well; trained in these new trends, some teachers wanted update

themselves but the teachers who are above 50 do not want to change themselves. They often tell that it is their retirement time and they do not want to change themselves any more. They are attached with politics but do not devote themselves win teaching learning activities in Nepal. No observation or monitoring systems are developed in our country. The teachers find themselves not respectable in the comparison of other public personnel and are not well motivated in teaching. Obviously, the teachers of Nepal are not given in any rank in the constitution and they are not given the equal consideration and respect as the officers in administration in the government same ranked. Teachers are never given any opportunities to travelling but others are given with bonus plus leave. Tickets, fuel, bikes and vehicles are available for others than teachers but no any teachers from primary to professors are given such facilities. In this way they can’t update but Students are more updated than teachers because of internet. The methodology that the available literatures suggest is somehow old and little outdated. The teacher needs more help and training for supporting the class of nowadays. The up to date plans and policies are not applied which is lagged in the given literature but it is necessary for the effective lesson.

### **Research Design and Method of the Study**

A research methodology is the blueprint of a research or study. Decisions regarding what, where, when, how much, by what means concerning an inquiry or a research study constitute a research design (Kothari, 2004). I adopted the Narrative inquiry research design supported by Discourse Analysis. To define narrative inquiry research, various scholars have put their views forward. Narrative researcher is increasingly used in studies of educational practice and experience, chiefly because teachers, like all other human beings, are storytellers who individually and socially lead storied lives (Connelly & Clendenin, 1990)

Narrative research is a literary form of qualitative research, which is all about collecting and telling

a story or stories (in detail). Researchers write narrative about experiences of individuals, describe a live experience and discuss the meaning of the experience with the individual. Usually, a narrative research designed is focused in studying and individual person. The researcher becomes the interpreter of the individual's stories, as opposed to a community.

### **Population Sample and Sampling Strategy**

A good research demands a large number of populations. So, the population of the study consisted of all the secondary level teachers as well as students of selected schools of Nepal. Since it is a small-scale study, it is difficult to collect data from each and every member of the respondents. So, the required sample will consist of ten secondary level teachers and ten students of the same level. Ten secondary level schools will be selected for this study and from each school one teacher and one student will be selected as sample purposive non-random sampling procedure. In another hand I shall also collect data through classroom discourse analysis examining discourse or language in use in classroom context. In the natural setting the naturally occurring data was collected.

### **Study Areas**

The research area of this study has selected government school of Nepal, class of heterogeneous students and secondary level teachers as well as students. The field of it is related to teaching and learning English in the classroom of heterogeneous students. For the feasibility of this study, I took a small sample size of total 30 participants that included fifteen secondary level English teachers and 15 students of Different secondary level school of the same localities by using purposive non- random sampling procedure. I used theory of saturation to select my sample size. Theory of saturation states that sample size should be stopped once the data get saturated (Creswell, 2013). My data get saturated at 15.

### **Data Collection Tools**

I have used both primary and secondary data by using different methods of data collection. This research is based on both primary and secondary data. The main tools of data collection for this study are listening story of the individual through interview, lived experience, some classroom observations and Discourse Analysis. These tools were supposed to be effective, appropriate and feasible for the respondents of this study and useful for the researcher to meet the objective of this study. When I analysed the field information, I categorized the whole information into the number of categories. I put all the information under different themes. While developing the themes, I consulted different books, reports, articles and other relevant materials. I rearranged the collected information. The method of this study used a narrative research design supported with discourse analysis. Discourse analysis emphasizes the contextual meaning of language; it focuses on the ways people use language to achieve specific effects.

The research focused on the issues of teaching English in the classroom of heterogeneous students. It is based on the perception of teachers as well as the students towards such class. Participants included teachers teaching English language in the secondary level of the government school in Saptari district and the students of Secondary level of the same schools. The research explored the perception of the reserachers involved in English language teaching learning activities, the problems they had to encounter while involving in the teaching learning and the possible solutions as suggestion to be adopted in teaching learning for effective class. Data collection accomplished through participant's narrative stories, discourse analysis, and interviews of individual students as well as group Discussion with students.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Data analysis is the heart of study that consists of describing and analysing the text to interpret the

context. Textual analysis refers to the description of what is expressed by the participants. Structural analysis refers to the interpretation of how it is expressed by the participants (Moustaks, 1994). By and large, most of the Narrative inquiry researchers are qualitative in nature, being a narrative inquiry research; it has the characteristics of quality analysis. After collecting the raw data, I analyzed it descriptively. On the basis of collected data, the results were derived and it was discussed in term of factors effecting English language teaching and learning in the classroom of heterogeneous students. Every classroom is heterogeneous and a teacher cannot turn them in homogeneous. All the classes need some tools and techniques to make the class room teaching effective. Some of the students cannot understand the language of the teacher so the teacher has to change strategy of teaching to accomplish the goal and to be a successful. In Nepal we have to teach students to make them able to secure good grade in the exam and to meet the standards of the examination. The system of exam standards should be dismissed. When a student can't successes it is thought that teacher had not taught better in our context that's why teacher had to be accountable so the teacher always focuses on the examination and the students are taught according to the view of examination.

### **Issues related with social and geographical background**

Amit Kumar Sah the English teacher of Sitapur secondary school and President of Nelta, Saptari said:

“In my class students are different in the basis of mother tongue. About 50 % students are Maithli speaking, 20% are Nepali mother tongue and 30% students are having Tharu language as their mother tongue. As English is their second language, they find negative transfer in English learning in the same way those who are good in study need the class faster while the average students need slow class which is difficult to manage as per their needs.”

One of the English teachers of Tilathi koiladi Rural Municipality, Mrs. Arhul Kumari Sah said:

‘About 90% of the students are Brahman and Rajput in my school. Rest 10% students are Yadav, Mandal, Khang and Mukhiya (Majhi). The Rajput and Brahmin thought themselves superior in the comparison of others students which is the main cause of conflict all the time which is the main problem I have been facing in my class to control them. Some students do not listen to me seriously. There are problems of technologies to handle the class. There is also the huge number of students in the same class.’

*“I generally find different types of students in my class. The students who come from the village area are not as intelligent as the students of the market area. The students of rural area are more disciplined than the students of city. In my classes the number of students is different in the aspects of casts, creeds, ability to learn, wealth, and many more, generally I find difficult to teach them with the same techniques and tools. According to him, the talented students need faster class while the slow learners need slow class. Sometimes I find difficulties to keep discipline in the class because of the heterogeneity.”*

According to her the feeling of cast and the superior and inferior cast in our societies that is one of the causes of heterogeneity is an issue to be addressed in the class and according to her the problem can be addressed by enough use of technologies. Laxman Mahto the English teacher of Public Bindeshwori has his story to said. It is clear from the statement of the teacher that the classes are disturbed by different things. The family background of the students is one of the main causes according to him. The effect of the place where they are from causes their psychology. The students from rural area bring the problems different than them living in the town and city. The children in the village are not enough influenced by social medias and movies. They seem more disciplined than the children in the city.

Chandeshwor Sah, the English teacher of Thako

Devi Jogendra Bhagat Rajdevi Secondary School said to me:

“I have found my class filled with several types of students, especially the poor students and the rich students, the poor area poor in performance while the children from well of family show good performance in their study. Girls are more serious but except some boys most of the boys have habit of getting obsess material. There is problem to handle the boys having the habit of getting gutka, parag, double majja etc and the generally do not care their study and it is the complain of the girls of our school the girls often complains that they do not like to sit with those boys.”

*“My school has various types of students. According to him many students leave their studies in the middles of their studies. Many boys have intention to go abroad in foreign employment and do not focus towards study and also disturb others so there is often fighting between laborious and weak students. The economically poor low cast students such as Dom, Mushar and many others do not want to be in the class because none speak with them and they are behaved as untouchable for the higher casts’ students. Many students of this area study in the private school in the primary level and then admitted in the Government school and because of the Napoli medium and English medium, another problem arises. But still I do not focus on the Problems Just think about the solution and so see some possibilities. I wanted to get some training about how to cope with the mixed students in the same class.”*

Ganesh Prasad Yadav, the English teacher of Hanuman Nagar Secondary school said to me

From the statement of him, it can be interpreted that the intention of the students of their future also has a vital role in the classroom. The foreign employment is the dream of some students and they have perception that the education and language is not so important for them. The students having very poor background and backwards casts have poor

performance. The teachers also need training and concerning for tackling these problems.

### **Factors Related with the use of ICT by Teachers as well as Students**

I have met a retired English teacher Mr. Phuleshwor Mandal and asked his personal experience on the heterogeneous students and he said to me:

“In my classes I found problems that some students are clever on electronic gadgets but others do not. Those who can play those things seemed smarter than the students not using those devices. I also do not know more about the use of ICT in teaching learning activities and therefore my classes were not very interesting and effective. Students of today do not wanted to be more disciplined. They want no pressure and no punishment is allowed nowadays. Digital things are more difficult for me.”

### **Effective Management of Heterogeneous class**

The English teacher of Janta secondary School, Khuruhuriya, Bisnupur rural municipality told his story;

*“As an English teacher I do not find my class very comfortable and so do my students. I do not have enough facilities to facilitate teaching learning activities. I think, we should start mobile learning to address heterogeneity. School Improvement plan can be also helpful tool if made addressing the issues. ICT and Google classroom are very essential in our context. Through the videos of YouTube teacher and students both can improve the pronunciation as well as other skills of English. The school and classes of Terai Region of Nepal is overloaded with students which also hinder teaching learning activities. There must have facilities of teacher according to the generally teach them the curriculum and assign some task to complete in the class and do not provide any homework so the children are happy in my class because I provide them the chance to speak in group and I often listen to them but their parents often complain that home work should be given to them. I think giving much*

*homework do not give them opportunities to be creative at their home instead be given enough time to enjoy at school and at home too.”*

*A participant teacher Rabindra Kumar Yadav said, “The ratio of students and teacher is no matching in our school. There is only one post is created for secondary level in this school. To handle all the students the number of teachers is very few but as English teacher I have to facilitate about 150 or more than 150 students in my class at the same time and in the same session which is the main cause of the low effectiveness in my class. The ratio of the teacher and students should be managed well for effective class. I need more time to encourage and motivate each and every student in my class. My students learn through more speaking practice and it is more time consuming.”*

Dev Kumar Yadav, the English teacher teacher of secondary level at Janta secondary school, Topa, Tilathi koiladi , said,

*“I have to handle about 100 students at the same time in the same class. Any way I used to activate all by dividing them in groups and by organizing different types of activities.”*

*As these two participants teacher state, it is found that a teacher find the number of students problematic and the number of students are more in each classes in the schools of Terai in Nepal and the government must consider about it but another teacher handle it by dividing them into groups for discussion and speaking practices which seems one of the wonderful techniques. When teacher have strong desire to teach student they can help them applying such techniques and the number of students do not matter.*

I have also collected stories from the following students through interview and focus group discussion under the following themes;

### **Language Interference**

Sahjadi Khatun a Muslim girl studying in class 9 told me that she and her other friends found difficulties in learning English because they had studied in

Madarsa in the beginning where they were taught in Urdu. They do not have background of learning English at lower classes. Similarly, at their home all prefer to communicate in Hindi or Urdu. They barely get chance to communicate In English. Only their English teacher encourages them to speak and communicate in English with friends in at least English class.

Kiran Kumar Yadav of class 10 said, *“we have good opportunity of learning in our English class and all other subjects are taught in Napoli medium but many of our friends do not understand the English medium teaching so English is also taught in Nepali medium and we are still not fluent in English.”*

According to him the first language hinders the English language teaching learning activities. The students of Nepal do not have English language speaking environment at home and in the locality but the medium of teaching English in our school is English, so the students cannot comprehend the medium of instruction easily and can't not perform as teacher's will.

Niraj Sardar said, *“My father has been working in Dubai and he had learned English through the use of YouTube and other social media, he suggests me to watch videos and listen the native speakers but mobile are not allowed in our school as well as the pronunciation of the teachers are not matching with the native speakers pronunciation. My father often suggests me to improve my English and the teacher do not help me as the number of students are more than 100 in our class.”*

According to the students the social media can also help to learn English language and it can be one of the best means to handle heterogeneous students. If mobiles are allowed to the Nepalese school, students individually use and find out the materials as per their needs but the teachers have to observe them and inspire the children to avoid misuse of the social media. The teacher should also concern about their pronunciation to make their instruction understandable. The number of students must be

scientifically managed so that the teacher find easy to tackle the class.

Sarswati Chaudhary, a student of class 10, said to me,

*‘I have also faced the problem of comprehension of the teacher sound and personalities. The teacher always speaks very fast and I find problems to understand the instruction of teacher. I feel shy to ask the teacher to repeat the lesson for me and so I can’t do good performances.’*

One of the students, Mahesh Kumar Shah, said

*‘I had found English class passive and very slow. Our English teacher wanted to teach faster but the maximum students could not understand and request the teacher for little bit fast and so he had to wait and often he had to teach our friends again and again. The girls often gossip in the class and do not care the class seriously. The teacher always motivates the friends but they do not care their study very much.’*

According to him there are some slow and sharp and quick students and the quick students want the class to be taught faster while the poor and slow students need the class to be run slower which is the problem for students and teacher as well.

Niraj Sardar of class 10 told me that most of the students of his class did not complete the assignment at home and the class because of their bad habits. Many of them had the habit of taking drugs and many other materials. Some of the students are problematic in the class and outside as well. They often fight with friends.

Puja Yadav, the 1st student of class 10 at Dwarika Srilal Satni Yadav secondary school, Bathana told her story that *the distance of his home is about 5 km and she often tired and the first period is English so she often felt sleepy in the class. She also found problem to have Tiffin because all her friend used to go to the nearby shop and take noodles and biscuits and when she tried to have her lunch they used to tease her as misè*

Ruhi Tiwari, one of the girl participants from grade 10 opined that:

*“We are taught English with the help of text book only but I had watched some videos on YouTube that has supported us to learn through different activities that our teacher lack. We had to stay in class all the time and couldn’t get chance to get experience to learn through communication with native speaker. In my home none speak English. They had to communicate in Maithili at home all the time so they could only get chance to speak in class for one period. Generally, teacher gave lecture and they didn’t get chance to speak even for some minutes.”*

### **Findings and Discussion**

The main purpose of this chapter was to explore the issues of teaching English in the classroom of heterogeneous classroom in the secondary level in the government school. Specifically, the participants shared their experiences through their stories. I analyzed the data gathered through different data collection tools like; Narrative story, Interview, observation and live experiences. Although the collection of narrative stories is regarded as the main data collection tool, discourse analysis, observation of live classes and interview of students and teacher has also helped me a lot. This study not only based upon the story and perception of the participants’ only but also upon the real experiences of the researchers as the English teacher in the same level too. This research can be considered directive because its sampling method is purposive. I have developed the abstract themes for my study findings and discussion.

Data collected through interviews, story and observation are used for this study. This research examined how students and teachers describe the heterogeneous class, what are their perceptions towards such classes. The research questions were addressed under two themes i.e. the perception of the researchers towards the heterogeneous students, issues of teaching learning activities in the heterogeneous class.

## Conclusion

The overall view of the research that concludes the research work. The present study is related with English language teaching in the class of heterogeneous students. It deals with the issues of teaching English in such class. The main issues of teaching English in the classroom of heterogeneous students in the secondary school of Nepal described in this study are based on research findings, theoretical claims, practical experiences and personal stories of the selected teachers.

The teacher who got education about 20 years ago became outdated. The teacher needed update with the new trend and technology. They need training very often to update themselves. They are rarely and barely got any training. Myself as a teacher, in my service of 8 years had not got any opportunity of any training. In the same way the teacher should be given opportunity to travel the best teaching school within our country and outside the country having the best education system and those strategies may transform the teacher to teach the students in the best way but unluckily in Nepal the teachers are not given any such opportunity. In the lack of all these problems majority of the teachers do not know the background and the psychology of the children and how to interact with them. This has created a problem for students to be active in the teaching learning process as both the teacher and the students both have problem to understand each other.

I strongly suggest that the teacher must be given every respect of chances to build them first as the education is the fuel for the development which is lacked in our country. Heterogeneity can be taken as the problem creating environment in the classroom, the different teachers have different views on heterogeneous class but every student and every student have to face some challenges for effective teaching learning.

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