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Experiences of Teachers and Students in Multicultural Nepalese Classrooms

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Abstract

This article explores the teachers' behaviour and students' experiences in multicultural classrooms in Nepal. Applying the phenomenological qualitative research design, we selected two schools from the study area that have a more diversified population. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with the teachers and students, and a focus group discussion with the students. We used a thematic data analysis procedure to analyze the data. This study found that the schools' policies are unable to address the needs of culturally different children. The schools have focused on providing economic support to the students rather than addressing their cultural needs. We found that the traditional training packages for teachers were insufficient to deal with multicultural classrooms. Because of a lack of knowledge of cultural, language, and feelings of students' and families' background, teachers were unable to deal with the students properly. Although the teachers were sincere on cultural issues nowadays, at the beginning of their career, their practices were not child-friendly. At the same time, we found that the experiences of students were also disgraceful in the school related to culture and language. They had difficulties in classroom adjustment because of being a different culture, they had problems in proper pronunciation and tongue in the Nepali language.

Keywords: Multicultural education, multicultural pedagogy, cultural diversity, cultural gap

Introduction

Society is becoming "super-diverse" (Tatham-Fashanu, 2021) because of migration and globalization. Nepali society is also being diversified in culture,

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religion, language, economic status, ethnicity, and indigenoussness. There are 10 different religions, 125 castes, and 123 languages (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2012) in Nepal. Migration is also widespread in Nepal. The main movements are from rural to urban; from hills to Tarai, and from mountains to hills and Tarai. The migration rate from mountains is 17.1%, from hills is 68.9%, and from Tarai is 14% (Sharma et al., 2014). This type of internal migration is making society more diversified and varied in nature. Such diversity is worldwide, in either developing or developed countries. The population of ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious minorities in the West is growing faster than the population of mainstreaming people. The effects of globalization and migration have diversified western society, including the United States (Banks & Banks, 2010).

The super-diversity of society affects education and classroom activities because it changes the students' composition by caste, culture, religion, economic background, ethnicity, and physical characteristics. In such a context, the teachers have to be familiar with multicultural education.

Multicultural education in general is a provision that ensures educational equality for all students, regardless of caste or culture. It ensures an equal and equitable learning environment for all the students. The focus of multicultural education is usually on explicit or overt aspects of culture such as religion, language, dress, food habits, and so on. But these aspects of culture are like an iceberg. The implicit or covert aspects of culture such as behaviour, feelings, experiences, emotions, physical conditions, etc. are not addressed and focused on in schools (Erickson, ed. on Banks and Banks, 2010). So, multicultural education is the practice and behaviour that is focused on enabling, emancipating, and empowering students who are not in the mainstream.

It is noticed that due to a lack of proper training and skills, teachers' behaviour is prejudicial and discriminatory towards culturally different students. Most teachers have a "cultural eye" (Irvine, 2003). They see the students through their own culture rather than their own culture. Such "cultural blindness" and "cultural eye" are the results of a lack of proper knowledge and skills in pedagogical practices (ibid.). Such practices by teachers cannot improve the learning environment of the school or create the feeling that school is for all. In the Nepali minority, marginalized, ethnic, and culturally backward communities are not yet mainstreamed, and children from such groups feel learning difficulties in the classrooms. They feel difficulty in language and classroom interaction, and as a result, they become unable to achieve the same academic performance as mainstreamed children. My assumption and claim are that teachers are not trained and prepared for multicultural education in Nepal. The traditional training packages are insufficient for the teachers.

The curriculum and textbooks are unable to address the needs of the students, and the schools do not focus themselves on making proper policies to address the diversity of culture.

The modern era of the 21st century demands culturally aware, sensitive, and competitive citizens, and this is only possible through proper education and cultural knowledge. The students of today need to feel a fair atmosphere in schools and classrooms. This is only possible through proper pedagogical practices in the classrooms. In such a context, the purposes of the study are to analyze the cultural diversity of the schools, to evaluate the schools' policies regarding cultural diversity, and to explore teachers' experiences and behaviour in a multicultural classroom.

Literature Review

Theoretical Consideration

The study is based on Vygotsky's (1982) sociocultural theory. The theory asserts that children learn from their family and society, and the theory also suggests that human learning is largely a social process (Cherry, 2019). Sociocultural factors include language and everyday thoughts, which affect the learning of a child. What a child sees, feels, experiences, perceives, and believes affects his/her learning, and this is everyday knowledge. Vygotsky (1982) terms curriculum knowledge as scientific knowledge and home knowledge as everyday knowledge, and the differences between these two types of knowledge create learning problems (Hedegaard, 2003). Everyday knowledge can be characterized as concepts that are connected to the domain of daily family and community life. The teacher should have to know what the students possess from their family and community as cultural heritage (Hedegaard, 2003). She has to use that knowledge to extend their learning and she has to respect their daily life experiences and should utilize them in teaching-learning activities.

According to Vygotsky (1982), children learn from their family and more knowledgeable others (MKO). There is a level of learning which is 'Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky defines ZPD as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Pathan et al., 2018. p. 233). The culture and family help them to reach the ZPD, the capacity of the children. This is the actual level that they want to reach (Hedegaard, 2003). The teachers have to identify the actual level of students and help them to reach a higher level, which they create from their daily life experiences and their culture. In easy terms, the teachers have to foster cultural knowledge rather than reject it.

Empirical Review

The school is known as a social system. If society is diverse and multicultural, then the school will be diverse and multicultural as well. Traditional curricula, textbooks, and pedagogical practices address only the mainstream children, leaving other children from minorities, ethnic groups, marginalized communities, and disadvantaged groups untouched and unaddressed. Sleeter (2001) says that teachers possess stereotypical beliefs about urban students and they have little knowledge of racism, discrimination, and structural aspects of inequality (as cited on Irvine, 2003). The prejudice and presumptions of teachers have a negative impact on students' learning. This prejudiced assumption and belief says that many teachers are not properly trained to teach in the multicultural classroom.

Multicultural education is multidimensional and multifaceted. It has different areas in teaching-learning and teachers' attitudes and behaviour. It deals with equality, equity, and justice. In the simplest sense, multicultural teaching means bringing children's everyday knowledge arising from community and family life into the classroom (Hedegaard, 2003). Mio et al. (2006) say, "It (multicultural education) is the systematic study of all aspects of human behaviour as it occurs in settings where people of different backgrounds encounter one another" (as cited on Lott, 2010, p. 10). Here, human behaviour signifies the behaviour of teachers, students, school leaders, and policymakers.

Multicultural education, in its broadest sense, refers to all educational practices that take place in schools, including curriculum, pedagogy, and other educational policies and plans; in a narrower sense, it refers to pedagogical practices and teacher behaviour in multicultural classrooms.

Multicultural education is multidimensional and it covers a wide range of study and research. So in this study, we have focused on teachers' behaviour and pedagogical practice in the classroom. Thus, multicultural education is to enhance the learning of culturally marginalized children. It helps to change the attitude of teachers towards other cultures. Studies have shown that even in developed countries like the USA, teachers are "colour blind" and they have a certain "cultural eye". The "colour blind" concept is to look at the students' own colour or discriminate against others' based on colour.

"Cultural eye" (Irvine, 2003) is another concept which is the discriminating behaviour of teachers based on culture. As Sleeter (2001) found, "White pre-service teachers bring very little cross-cultural knowledge, experience, and understanding to teaching, they possess stereotypical beliefs about urban students and they have little knowledge of racism, discrimination, and structural aspects of inequality" (as

cited on Irvine, 2003, p. xvi). This scenario is not only in America and Europe; it is worldwide even in Nepal. Nepal is a developing country and the proper training packages are not sufficient to address the cultural issues of the classroom.

Multicultural education helps to create teaching strategies that are meaningful for the children, contribute to their acquisition of skills and knowledge, and foster positive identity and acceptance of their cultural background. If there is no proper interaction between teacher and student, the students will become weaker in their performance. Clewell (2002) and Francis (2000) found “In the early grades, girls and boys achieve equally in mathematics and science. However, the achievement test scores of girls fall considerably behind those of boys as children progress through the grades “(as cited on Banks & Banks, 2010, p. 3). This is because of the decreasing interactions of the students with the teachers and colleagues. Hesitation and shyness lessen the interactions of female students.

Another serious problem that Irvine has discussed is how an unfavourable school environment becomes a nightmare for many students. Irvine (2003) says that nightmares come both day and night for many children in the form of poverty, violence, hunger, poor health, drug addiction, inferior schools, and insensitive policies. To draw the children from the nightmares, cultural sensitivity and proper cultural knowledge are needed by the teachers.

Teaching in a multicultural environment or diversified school is a more responsible and sensitive function of a teacher. Gay (2013) names it “culturally responsive teaching.” According to him, “Culturally responsive teaching emphasis on “teaching to” cultural diversity helps students acquire more accurate knowledge about the lives, cultures, contributions, experiences, and challenges of different ethnic and racial groups” (Gay, 2013, p. 49). Culturally responsive teaching aims to widen the knowledge of students of their own culture as well as raise a feeling of respect towards others’ cultures. It is also an issue of equity and social justice.

Diversity is the beauty of society. It is a cultural mosaic that makes it perfect and complete. Each culture has its own importance and value, which is cultural capital. So, culturally responsive teaching uses the social and cultural capital of different cultural groups in the classroom. It is valuing and respecting all the cultures that the students possess. Gay (2013) says, “Culturally responsive teaching is the behavioural expression of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognize the importance of racial and cultural diversity in learning” (p. 50).

Students and teachers who understand the value of different cultures develop positive feelings and attitudes toward cultural others. Gay (2013) further asserts, “It cultivates cooperation, collaboration, reciprocity, and mutual responsibility

for learning among students, and between students and teachers” (p. 51). So, multicultural education is to ensure mutual understanding, cooperation, and collaboration. It is to share a culture of mutuality among the students and teacher-students.

Multicultural education further makes students able to analyse, challenge, and alter inequity, injustice, domination, and abuse of power. It also helps students to raise their voice against the cultural hegemony that educational institutions have been holding for a long time (Gay, 2003). The cultural hegemony is in the form of language, teaching methods, teaching materials, curriculum, and textbooks, which are practiced in the schools. All these have to be challenged and questioned.

Hedegaard (2003) has discussed the methods of multicultural education. Children bring a lot of knowledge from their home and culture. When a teacher becomes able to fit homely knowledge with curriculum knowledge, children learn easily what the teacher wants to teach. He says, “One of the difficulties faced by teachers is the need to connect subject concepts to children’s everyday concepts in ways that widen and develop children’s abilities” (Hedegaard, 2003, p. 135). Such a difficulty is the difficulty of multicultural pedagogy that the teachers face in the classes, including Nepal.

Teaching is not just telling and selling information; it is caring relationships. As Martin (1995) said, teachers who know the importance of multicultural classes turn “schoolhouses into school homes” with the “3Cs”- care, concern, and connection (as cited on Irvine, 2003). Here, care is building a relationship with all students equally, concern is taking an interest in the culture of students, and connection is establishing a relationship between home and school knowledge. Thus, the “3Cs” concept is a useful method in the multicultural classroom.

Multicultural pedagogy is a challenging task. The teachers should be more skilled and sensitive to it. Banks and Banks (2010) have suggested six dimensions to follow for multicultural education. The dimensions are content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture and social structure. All the dimensions are concerned with the school policies and teachers.

Multicultural education is not only related to teaching methods and strategies; it is related to the whole curriculum, including the assessment system of the students. Assessment is one of the major parts of the teaching-learning process. The instruments, procedures, methods, and processes that are used for assessment are said not to be culturally biased and partial.

Methods and Procedures

In this study, we have applied the qualitative research with the phenomenological design. Our research paradigm is critical (Mack, 2010), and we believe in multiple realities (as ontological position).

Study Area

This study was conducted in Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City, Kailali of Sudur Pashchim Province, Nepal because Kailali district is a highly migrant district in Nepal and is highly diversified in culture, caste, economy, religion, and language (District Development Committee Kailali, 2015).

Participants

The headteachers, teachers, and students were the participants in this study, and we selected two schools, two headteachers, four teachers, and eight students to fulfill the purpose of this study. We purposefully selected two schools which had the most diversified societies. We selected the social studies teachers who have long experience in teaching and we selected the students from Dalit, Madheshi, Tharu, and Rana Tharu communities based on quota sampling.

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

By applying in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and document analysis, we have tried to make the research more authentic and reliable. We interviewed the head teacher, teachers, and students. Furthermore, we conducted FGD with the students to reach a conclusion. We studied the policy documents of the schools, mainly the minutes of the school management committee, to see whether the school had addressed cultural diversity or not.

Data Analysis Procedures

At the beginning, the data we collected was as thick as a description. To make the data more meaningful, we went through different stages. We had recorded the voices of the interviewees and FGD participants. We transcribed the verbal data into written symbols, generated initial codes, searched for themes from the codes, refined the themes, defined the themes, and selected some themes for the title and sub-titles. The thematic analysis was deductive (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We also analyzed the information comparing it with the policy documents available in the schools' records. Finally, we concluded the discussion by comparing the theory with previous studies.

Results and Discussion

We have analysed the data based on the purpose of the study. The findings are organized into different topics and sub-topics to fulfill the purpose. The previous studies and the theory are our guidelines for the discussion and findings in this study.

Composition of Students by Caste and Culture

Kailali is one of the most migrant districts in Nepal. While Kailali district has 240 people per square kilometer, the average density in Nepal is around 180 (District Development Committee, Kailali, 2015). The migration rate decides the diversification of society. The schools that we selected for this study are also known for being diversified in culture and caste. The majority of the students at both schools were Tharu students, who are known as the ethnic caste of Kailali district.

The majority of students were ethnic in each class in school 'A' - mainly Tharu community students, including Rana Tharu and Chaudhary Tharu. These two castes are also different in language, culture, and traditions. These are the ethnic people of the Kailali district with their own language, culture, religion, clothing, festivals and traditions. They speak the Tharu language. They celebrate Maghi as a main festival. Females used to wear their own dresses - Lenhanga and Choli - and males used to wear Lagauti and Bheguwa. They worship nature although they are Hindus.

Dalits are traditionally an untouchable caste and an oppressed group. The endangered caste is Raji, and it has its own culture and traditions. Others include Brahmins and Kshatriyas, and these are mainstream castes.

In the school 'A', the first majority (80%) of students was ethnic caste. The second position was held by others (14%). The third position was held by Dalits (5%). Finally, endangered castes held (1%). In school 'B', the majority of the students were others (58%). This category embraces Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and other so-called higher castes. The second majority was of the ethnic group (29%) and the last, the Dalits (13%).

School Policies for Diversity Management

The data shows that the composition of students at both schools is varied in culture and language. We noticed that the ethnic and minority children were poor in their performance. The headteacher of school 'A' said, "Especially children from Muslim and Madheshi communities are poor in learning, and migrant children from Indian communities are also poor performers." In such a context, to ensure social justice and equity and to address the academic needs of the children, the schools have to make some policies and plans. When we asked the headteacher about it, he replied that there is a provision for school dress, scholarships, and other provisions for minority and ethnic children. But we could not find any pedagogic policies and plans for the targeted community. The headteacher of school "A" said,

We have distributed school dress and learning materials to Tharu, Dalit and other marginalized students with the support of a non-government organization (NGO). The main objective of this effort is to create an environment for enrollment, retention, and learning. This program helped us to increase enrollment. But we do not have any special policies for teaching and learning in our school.

He further said, “To empower the parents of marginalized and backward children, we make school plans in a participatory approach. The parents, teachers, and school management committee (SMC) prepare plans jointly, and this process helps to create ownership towards the school.” We noticed from observing the documents that the school prepares annual instructional plans involving the parents.

To solve the lingual problems of the non-Nepali-speaking children, the school has a bi-lingual training program for some primary-level teachers. The need for such training is for all teachers, but only two teachers were given language training. To address the different cultures and languages, the school organizes cultural programmes. The headteacher said, “To create harmony among different cultures and languages, the school organizes different cultural programs twice a year, and we have collected and prepared different types of dresses and ornaments from different cultural groups surrounding our society.” This statement shows that the school has focused on tangible and materialistic views of culture and intangible cultural aspects such as values, norms, behaviour and meaning-making processes that are left unaddressed. According to the headteacher, culture is only the material objects and tangible aspects of culture and this view is a partial and overt view of culture. The whole view of culture is not covered yet by the school policies.

The headteacher of school ‘B’ also said that minority group children like Dalit and Raji are poor in learning. Rana Tharu community children are also weak in classroom performance. He said, “Nearly 2/3 of the children are from Rana Tharu and Mukta Kamaiya (released bound labour) community. These children are poor in classroom performance. He said that the main cause was absenteeism in the classroom. Such children make up nearly half of the population. The causes of higher student absenteeism are: a lack of interest in school activities; a lack of classroom instruction; and a lack of cultural context. Although the headteacher of a school asserted that, “Our school policy is mainly focused on three areas: school access, school retention, and classroom success.” However, no policy to promote a culturally friendly environment was observed, and access, retention, and success of culturally backward children are less likely than the school had anticipated.

The teachers have to know what the students possess from their family and community as cultural heritage (Hedegaard, 2003). If the school is unable to

link the heritage in pedagogy, there will be a gap, and this gap will certainly create learning problems. Another challenge for the school is to fit home knowledge into curriculum knowledge. As Vygotsky (1982) says, the schools have to recognize what the students know and what they want to know, but we found that there was no such practice in our context.

The schools prepare a school improvement plan (SIP) annually, but there is no space given for multicultural education. Neither the school management committee (SMC) nor the school administration pays attention to such a burning issue. The causes of students' absenteeism and poor academic performance are a lack of a child-friendly environment and a problem of cultural adjustment in the school. We found that the policies and strategies for students' diversity management in the schools are not proper and the policies are unable to emancipate and empower the culturally backward children. The school policies were only focused on economic grants and support. There were no policies for content integration, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture. We could not find any provision linking community knowledge to school knowledge. The school activities were limited to the curriculum, which was provided centrally.

Teachers' Behaviour and Experiences

As already discussed, the teachers were not well prepared for the multicultural classroom because there was no training package for teachers in Nepal to address the cultural issues. A teacher's sensitivity, sincerity, and skills are meaningful in culturally responsive teaching. The teachers whom we selected for this study were experienced and had a long journey in teaching. But it cannot be said that all the teachers are experienced. The teachers were experienced in terms of teaching, but they were not aware of proper practices in multicultural classrooms. For them, multicultural education means treating all the students equally.

The students whom we interviewed and discussed had no bad experiences from the teachers' side. They claimed that the teachers were treated equally, but they said that the teachers use the Nepali language all the time and do not prefer students' mother tongue. The students said that this practice creates learning difficulties. When we asked the headteacher about the causes of not using students' mother tongues in the classroom, he said, "The parents do not want it." The parents want their children to learn Nepali and English in the classroom, not their language. They say that they can teach their children the mother tongue at home. But the experiences of the teachers in the multicultural classroom are notable, which we will discuss in the following subheadings.

I Used to Abuse Students' Culture

Many teachers are not culturally aware and lack understanding of students'

family background and their parents' occupation. This misunderstanding can sometimes cause issues with classroom learning and adjustment. If the teachers hate certain occupations or customs related to the students, they will not feel at ease in the classroom and cannot be friendly with the teachers. If a teacher uses examples and illustrations without being sincere, it may be harmful to the students and the classroom activities. One of the teachers, 'Sudha', told her story similar to this one. When she was a beginning teacher, she used to teach moral science to grade six students. She used to believe that killing animals was a sin that God would never forgive. In her class, there was a student who belonged to a butcher family. When she used to tell stories about non-violence, the student used to turn red and feel uneasy in the classroom. Sudha explained,

I used to teach moral science in grade six. Based on the text, I had to say that killing animals is a sin. If we kill animals the god will never forgive us. We will be punished by God. One of a student, sitting on the first bench, used to listen to me carefully and silently. One day I noticed his restlessness and red face when I was teaching the topic of nonviolence, I asked the causes but he did not reply any answer. Later, I asked his friends about it and found that he belonged to a butcher's family. Killing animals and selling meat was his family's profession. I felt that I was abusing and attacking his family profession regularly. A few days later, he left school and never came back to it again. I think that I was the cause of his dropout. I think he became my victim. I will never forget that incident or ever forgive myself.

This is an example of a teacher's behaviour with the students in the classroom. Many novice and untrained teachers harm the students unknowingly. What the teachers say, do, and behave with the students affects the students forever. So the teachers should have proper knowledge and understanding of the students' culture, customs, family background, and knowledge.

I Slapped on a Student's Face

Language is a component of culture. Proper knowledge of the language makes teaching easy and it brings the students closer to the teacher. Usually, the teachers do not understand the students' mother tongue, and it creates a misunderstanding. One of the teachers, 'Purna', told his story of how he reacted to a lack of understanding of the student's mother tongue. He said that he was appointed as a teacher at a Rana Tharu community school. It was a primary school and there were a majority of Rana Tharu children, and he did not understand their language. One day, a student addressed him as 'ta', and he slapped him on his face because in the Nepali language, 'ता' (ta) is used to juniors and it is known as a dominating

word. There are many words in the Nepali language which are used to address different levels of people, such as 'तँ' (ta), 'तिमी' (timi) 'तपाईं' (tapaai) 'हजुर' (hajur) etc. But in the Rana Tharu language, 'तँ' (ta) is used for all people, either senior or junior, like the English word "you". Purna did not know these differences, and the misunderstanding occurred. Purna said,

At the beginning of my teaching profession, I was appointed to a school in the Rana Tharu community. I did not know the Rana Tharu language. One day, I was checking home work for a class. One of Rana Tharu's students had made mistakes in his work. I asked him who told him to do it this way. He said, (tailebhaneko) "तैले भनेको" (you told). I felt domination while he addressed me तँ (ta) (as 'thou' in old English) in front of the whole class. I slapped his face, saying not to address the teacher तँ (ta). Later, I told my headteacher about the incident. The headteacher laughed and said that in the Rana Tharu language तँ (ta) is a common word to address all the people, either the senior or the junior. The word is used as 'you' in the English language. I felt ashamed and realized my misbehaving with the student, due to a lack of proper understanding of the student's language.

This is one of the stories of Purna that tells how language creates problems in the classroom. Usually, the majority of teachers are from the mainstream in Nepalese schools. They do not understand the culture, language, religion, customs, traditions, and values of the local community. The teachers whom we chose for this study were experienced in cultural issues and sincere in their duty. They accepted that teachers' experience, training, proper cultural understanding, responsibility, and professional honesty are the main themes for good pedagogical practices in the multicultural classroom. However, the majority of teachers in Nepal do not have access to a proper cultural training package, and they do not know how to deal with a multicultural classroom. In such a context, good teaching-learning cannot be expected.

Students' Experiences in the Schools

The students who we interviewed and discussed had no culturally biased behaviour or experiences from the teachers' side. They said that teachers' behaviour was equal to all. They had no prejudicial or cultural bias behaviour towards the students. But there was no special treatment for culturally backward children. One of the notable facts the schools accepted was that certain community children, like Tharu and Rana Tharu community children, were poor in academic performance. It was considered an economic factor in the family and had nothing to do with cultural factors such as language, customs, or belief systems. Some of the significant stories that the students shared are discussed in the following topics.

I Cannot Interact with the Teachers

Classroom interaction is the main foundation of learning. If the teacher and students interact in the class, many confusions, misunderstandings, and misconceptions become clear. It makes the teacher and student closer. Good interaction between the teacher and the students promotes higher learning achievements. However, because of their language and tongue, many students are unable to interact with their teachers or even their peers. They think that if they ask questions in the class, their classmates will laugh at them. They sit at the back of the class, silently and timidly, and they adopt a culture of silence forever.

We noticed the same case here. One of the Rana Tharu students, 'Pyare', told his story after my deep efforts. He said,

"Many times, I try to ask questions to the teachers, but I feel hesitant and shy because my tone is different than others' and I can't speak like other students. I can't differentiate the sounds like "त" (ta) and "ट" (ta). When I try to ask questions or want speak, my friends laugh at me. So, I sit silently in the classroom even when I do not understand the teachers."

The student is only a representative character. Many students, who belong to the minority culture, feel ashamed in the classroom because they cannot speak fluently and have language problems. This lessens classroom interaction and causes a weakness in academic performance. In such a case, the school and the teacher must use equity pedagogy to help students achieve academic success (Banks & Banks, 2010).

The Colour of my Skin Humiliates me

Sometimes students' physical structure and disabilities hamper their learning abilities. Physically different students think that they are not similar to their classmates. This feeling reduces classroom interaction. Lack of classroom interaction pushes them away from learning activities. One student, 'Sharawan', of grade eight, shared his experiences as:

The colour of my skin is darker than others. My friends dominate me by addressing me as 'Deshi' (this informal word is used in Nepal for Indians). Although I am not 'Desi' (Indian), I am from Madesh (eastern Tarai). When I try to interact with the teachers, I feel frightened and hesitant. I think that my friends will laugh and shout at me. So, I do not ask any questions to my teachers in the classroom.

As Irvine (2003) has noticed, in western society, teachers are 'colour-blind' and they have 'cultural eyes', but we could not notice such prejudices in the schools from the teachers' side, but students were not very sincere in such cases. Although

this case may be exceptional, students' prejudiced behavior cannot be ignored. So, the schools have to prepare the children to live with harmony and respect all castes, culture, colour, language, and other types of cultural differences. If the students do not find the proper environment in the schools, many effects might be seen in teaching and learning. Drop out, absenteeism, low performance, a bunk of the class, etc. are the causes of the unfair school environment.

Stereotypic Assumptions

The school administration (headteacher), teachers, and students have stereotypical assumptions about certain castes and cultural groups of students. We asked them whether certain caste or cultural group students were weaker than mainstream students or not. Nearly all replied that Tharu, Rana Tharu, and Dalit students are weaker than others. This is a stereotypical assumption towards certain castes and groups, and we think this was a prejudice. Prejudice reduction is a dimension of multicultural education, but such prejudice is widespread in schools.

Conclusion

From the beginning of its history, Nepali society was diversified and multicultural. Nowadays, it is becoming more diversified and varied because of internal migration. In such a diversified society, the schools and classrooms also become diversified and multicultural. The schools have to deal with different cultural, ethnical, indigenous, and marginalized children similarly and equally to create equity and social justice, which is challenging and difficult for many teachers because of their lack of proper skills and knowledge of multicultural education. The prejudice and discriminated behaviour of the teachers is also an issue of multicultural education. Irvine (2003) gives the 'cultural eye' and 'colour-blind' concepts to such a context.

Mainly, the function of multicultural education is to increase the students' learning efficiency. But it is not limited only to teaching-learning processes. Multicultural education is a social justice perspective that focuses on enabling, empowering, and energizing students against cultural hegemony by emphasizing mutual understanding, collaboration, cooperation, and coordination among students. It also aims to protect the culture, language, and identity of the cultural other. Multicultural education holds that students have certain homely knowledge, skills, and attitudes that should be utilized by the school and teachers in their learning. School education and home/family education should be tailored to each other so that students can easily learn and feel at ease in schools.

The school policies are focused on financial support for students. Little attention is paid to managing cultural diversity in schools, and it is limited to overt

culture. Covert culture is still unseen and untouched in schools. In the same way, schools are unable to integrate cultural or social heritage with school learning. The schools are just disseminating a centrally loaded curriculum.

The teachers are not prepared for multicultural education. They do not have the proper training to deal with multicultural classrooms. For them, multicultural education means treating all the students equally. For lack of a proper understanding of culture, sometimes the teachers misbehave with the students. There is no application of the '3Cs'-care, concern, and connection (Martin, 1995, as cited on Irvine, 2003). There is no effort to tailor home knowledge to curriculum knowledge. The teachers are unable to find out what the students know and what they want to know. In such a context, the 'dream keeper'(Ladson-Billings, 1995) concept of the teacher is just a dream. The teachers have to shift their paradigm from a traditional one to a modern and more humane one.

For many students, learning comes as a nightmare in the night and daytime (Irvine, 2003), as poverty, language problems, and physical problems dominate their lives. Students are unable to interact with the teachers because of hesitation, fear, and lack of self-confidence. We think multicultural education is possible through "care", "share" in a "fair" environment, and all these go towards the teachers' side. So, the teachers must be caregivers rather than instructors for good practices in the classroom.

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