

Classroom Dynamics in the Foreign Language Classroom

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Abstract

To have the purpose for exploring the classroom dynamics of foreign language teachers and students, the researcher had conducted the comprehensive field study. Both teachers and students are supposed as the individually different personalities with respect to their socio-cultural background, behaviors, interests, attitudes and so forth. Well consideration of classroom context and culture might ensure the betterment of the students. It might be more essential in the rural classroom where the situation of foreign language teaching is said to be challengeable. For this research study, 2 teachers and 10 students were selected purposively. Later on, the information was collected through in-depth interview and class observation; and analyzed them after all.

After the analysis and interpretation of the information, it was found that because of being the teachers demotivated, the classroom dynamics had been poorly understood and exercised, consequently, the students were disappointed. Hopefully, the finding might be helpful for foreign language teachers, teacher-educators, school supervisors and students as well.

Key Words: Classroom Dynamics, Group Dynamics, Attitude, Culture, Context

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Introduction

I ever cannot forget a memorable talk held with one of my colleagues, a primary level teacher, while sipping tea in a rustic restaurant situated in the Far Western Hill. I could say here that he wanted to utter his own lived experience of teaching foreign

language in the primary classroom. He said, "I have no any ideas about what I have been teaching in the classroom." Immediately, I inquired him, "why?" "What do you think about the students then?" He said, "Nothing." He added, neither somebody commented him nor he was supervised by anybody till the date. Further, he added, he

tried to keep his students in tough discipline, so that they could fully be obedient towards him. In case someone appeared disobedient, he slapped at once. Furthermore, he said, "I always translate every word in my local language and sometimes in Nepali as well." "This is my day to day practice in the English language classroom," he said. I nodded my head and told him that he could change his strategy of classroom teaching if he wanted. But, he said, "I couldn't though I wanted." "It's ok, I said.

A classroom might comprise variously. Presence of students and teachers, their socio-cultural background, acquired/learned attitudes and habits, physicality of the classroom, nature of subject matter to be taught and way of teaching might both be fundamental and extramural components of the classroom. Both teachers and students could be well familiar to each other along with the context of the classroom. In contrast to various disciplines; foreign language might have to be taught in purely different context. Despite the students come from diverse backgrounds, society, culture, language and norms and values, the teachers could be familiar to their social and pedagogical needs (Senior, 2002), believes, cultures, behaviors and so forth and tend to rehearse the pedagogical practices accordingly.

Since English language has perceived as a foreign language status mainly because of its tremendous use in the classroom instruction from school to university level (Bista, 2011), henceforth, it would be essential to know about how the classroom strategy has been practicing. It is supposed that the situation of foreign language

teaching/learning has been transforming from sheer traditional to modernized or digitalized one. If so it might be obvious that the teacher-centered pedagogy would have to be replaced by the learner-centered one. Considering the context as it is said, the classroom practices available in the rural areas based institutions need to be studied with respect to the classroom culture, teacher-students' relationship and their attitudes and behaves to each other within and outside the classroom. In a nutshell, such a classroom delivery between students and teachers is termed as classroom dynamics (Hadfield, 2000).

The sound cooperation might ensure the positive classroom environment. At the moment, even the students from diverse background could learn together without any hesitation and barriers provided that the role of the teacher should be primary to activate the existing dynamics in either/both the teacher-centered or/and student-centered classroom (Galajda, 2012). However, understanding the classroom dynamics and teaching accordingly might be easier in student-centered rather than the teacher-centered ones.

With respect to the classroom dynamics of the language classroom, Hadfield (2000) states that there might be diverse nature of students who behave and perform variously, however, it's the teacher who will understand them firstly, then manage the classroom and teach each of them necessarily. In a classroom, students might be active/passive, talkative/silent, curious to learn or lazy, co-operative/non-cooperative, friendly/proud, introvert/extrovert, responsive/non-responsive, talent/weak and

so forth; so as the teachers in the classroom indeed. A better teacher would be student-friendly and listen everyone and response accordingly, whereas, some others might be repressive in role relationship, poorly cooperative and rarely responsive towards them and their problems. However, teaching foreign language in the non-native context might become more challengeable because of the fusion of both foreign and local cultures together. Despite having the probable challenges there, the teacher can manage the cohesive groups listen their problems, let be introduced to each other as friendly as possible and set up the cooperative environment in the classroom (Hadfield, 2000). Therefore, each of them can learn both from the peers and teacher one at a time.

Purpose of my Study

The purpose of my research study is to explore the efforts and perceptions of foreign language teachers and students regarding classroom dynamics in the rural area based institutions.

Research Questions

The probable research questions could be:

- a. How do the EFL teachers tend to manage the classroom dynamics within the classroom?
- b. How do the students behave themselves and expect the practices from teachers in the classroom?

Methodology

The study purposed to analyze the classroom dynamics through the perspective of foreign language teachers and students in

the Basic level classroom. Keeping the purpose for analyzing the classroom dynamics of foreign language classroom, I had selected Bajhang as my research site and 2 Basic level English teachers (1 from a school) and 10 students studying in the same level (5 from each school) there purposively. To draw the information inclusively, 5 boys and 5 girls student participants were selected.

With regards to the approaches of information collection; both class observation and in-depth interview were applied. It was hoped and performed accordingly that with class observation, the classroom milieu with respect to students' practice among the peers while learning foreign language; and teacher and students' rehearsal to each other while teaching the same could be recorded lively. On the other hand, the assigned in-depth interview could be helpful for establishing good relationship and collecting the information with asking questions to the individual/group about their practices in the field of researching (O'reilly, 2005). Here, my effort of interviewing about the classroom dynamics remained in practice individually. Consequently, both the teachers and students participants could express their lived experience perceived in the classroom easily.

As the data were collected, they were analyzed and interpreted by using the interpretive paradigm. Here, both teachers' and students' classroom dynamics were analyzed and discussed on the basis of their own practices and perceptions in the classroom along with their perspectives.

Results and Discussions

As far it has been well acknowledged that the foreign language classroom is full of multiplicity and dynamicity. Classroom multiplicity and dynamicity demarked the context of the classroom. My research embarked the same which has taken place within the extremely remote classroom where I have been teaching foreign language for a long time. For the occurrence of classroom dynamics, both the teachers and students have their own perspectives. Both of them are quite assured that the classroom strategy has been influenced by each other's attitudes, behaviors, relationship, mutual understanding, and so forth within the classroom. In addition to their experiential perception of classroom dynamics, the students' group dynamics would also shape their learning. To be clearer about the results gotten, here is worthwhile to present and analyze the information both from the perspectives of teachers and students.

Teachers' Efforts for Maintaining Classroom Dynamics

Thought provoking lived experiences of the foreign language teachers as my research participants made me more curious about the nature of classroom dynamics in the remote institutions. Do you think the teachers are only for completing their assigned course to be taught? Can you imagine the textbook is only the sole material for teaching in 21st century classroom? Would it be possible teaching foreign language keeping dozens of teenagers in the same classroom? Can the foreign language teachers adapt themselves

with mixed nature of students in the rural classrooms? Such queries might be recurrent to any of those who have taught and visited the rural classroom in these days.

Mostly the teachers tend to focus on what they wanted to do rather than their students' demands; hence the pedagogical practices nurtured the teacher-centered approach (Alexandra, 2013). Their usual practice (entering into the classroom, opening the book, reading and describing the lesson, assigning the task for next day, etc) might depict the real picture of the rural classroom. Most of my teacher participants looked as if they were quite unfamiliar about the necessity of classroom dynamics. From their spontaneous response, it could be predicted that they hardly spent any time to manage the classroom dynamics. However, in case they thought they have time; they engaged students in common types of day to day activities like; Antachheri, quiz contest, spelling contest, singing, dancing, etc. As I had understood, all of them mostly seem for finishing their assigned course as fast as possible.

Classroom context of foreign language might somehow be different from any other disciplines. Hence the roles of the foreign language teachers while teaching could surely be different from their fellows while teaching various subjects in the same classroom. However, my teacher participants behaved quite differently. Here, one of my participants viewed that:

Students are academically poor except 2/3 of them in our classroom. On the one hand, I have the large classroom; on the other, most of them are from poor background. Then,

how can I tackle such a situation? The easy way I think, teach the students what it has been prescribed in the course book as our colleagues do in other classrooms too.

However, Senior (2002) expresses that no two language classes might be same with respect to the classroom context, cultures and knowledge level of the students. Therefore, each classroom demanded the separate classroom pedagogy accordingly. My next participant expresses his daily activities as;

I have to say frankly here. Teaching in the large classroom has become my ongoing habit for a long time. As I start teaching, my classroom procedures remain similar and same in different classrooms. Along with the betterment of students my daily planning for teaching orients towards completing the course. Therefore, without spending my valuable time for unnecessary matter, I mostly focus on textbook teaching.

However, for the betterment of the students, the language teachers should spend significant amount of class time in behaving with the students about other than teaching the content directly (Allright, 1996; as cited in Senior, 2002). The classroom behaviors of the language teachers should be equipped with the social and pedagogical needs of the classroom for which they might treat the students on the basis of their individual differences (Senior, 2002). The teachers should motivate the students, listen their problems, be always calm and cool, read face of the students whether understood the subject matter or not and provided extra time to the poor ones. Therefore, each of them could get chances to learn language in

their own. However, in my observation, I could not notice any of my participants trying to do so. All the students were free of choice to sit in the classroom. Those who usually habituated to sit on the front benches, they seem quite attentive towards teachers, but back bench ones neither themselves duly paying attention nor the eyes and mind of the teachers could reach there.

Students' Perception about Classroom Dynamics

Students in the classrooms might have their own attitudes, thoughts, interests, behaviors and living styles. They might behave differently in a same classroom, hence the classroom could be assumed as the small community with massive diversity. Each of them would hope to address their problem from teachers. However, it might depend on the attitudes and practices of the teachers. In a research conducted by Senior (2002) her research participants (students) would hope for taking rest whenever tired, entertainment whenever bored and addressing individual's interest in the classroom; the language teachers decided to apply the impromptu strategies which they would think as per timely.

Similarly, in my research, firstly I tried to find the general expectation of the students while learning foreign language in the classroom. Most of them viewed that the language teachers had better understand their students' level of learning and teach accordingly. Secondly, they argued that the large classroom inhibited them from having teacher's guidance as equally as possible. In the classroom, what the language teacher

could do is, set up the discursive environment between/among students as socially as possible even for the small roles (Cehan as cited in Ayyash, 2011). Consequently, all the students could be benefited both equally and inclusively. However, such environment could scarcely experience even these days in the rural institutions.

Consideration of the group dynamics in the classroom might also play the prominent roles for foreign language learning. It is the composition of students with their shared habits, attitudes and behaviors within the classroom (Dornyei and Murphey, 2009). Hoping that the students could learn from their own peers; the teacher should have to manage their sitting arrangement and other managements on the basis of their chemistry and desires. In my observation what found was, the boys and girls sat on the separate benches and somewhere separate rows and columns as well. As I see their sitting arrangement might mostly have influenced by the gender based reality. In response to my query of their sitting arrangement both boys and girls students expressed that it's their compulsion being they are from separate gender. Moreover, they confessed that their EFL as well as any other teachers never rearrange their sitting which remained same all over their session. Though the classroom management has the most effective roles for their academic achievement (Marzano and Marzano, 2003), it seems firmly neglected in the classroom. If the classroom might have well managed with decoration and sitting arrangement with cohesiveness, the students can

internalize the subject matter both from their peers and teachers.

Choice of freedom within and outside the classroom is also equally important for the students. It might also depend on the attitude and strategy of the language teacher. If the language teacher allows each of them, they can get access otherwise not. Most of the participants uttered that they are quite good in writing but very poor in speaking. The reason behind might be giving less focus on practising speaking skill.

Conclusion

Classroom dynamics might be embedded with the concept that Together Everyone Achieve More (TEAM). So, it is inevitable factor for general as well as foreign language learning. Since the classroom dynamics might be helpful for the fulfillment of both social and pedagogical needs of the students; whatever the level, it had better be understood. However, it may depend on the role and responsibility of the classroom teacher. Unless he/she considers that it is important, it might not be functional. From the research study, it was found that the rural teachers could not be so serious about the application of classroom dynamics.

From the research, it was found that the efforts of foreign language teachers with respect to managing the classroom dynamics seem quite bewildered and disappointed because of the influence of teachers' attitudes and societal and classroom cultures. Along with this, the students' poor academic background became the sole factor to be demotivated in the classroom. However, the process of classroom

dynamics without or somehow tangible reformation, be operated in the rural classroom.

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