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## Critical Pedagogy and Equity Promotion in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classroom

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### Abstract

This paper explores English language teachers' perception of critical pedagogy and equity promotion in lingo-cultural diverse classroom. The study concerns how the teachers find multicultural students' problems and address them in the classroom. The study further investigates how teachers use dimensions of equity (multicultural education, social justice education and culturally responsive pedagogy) to promote social harmony, critical awareness and independent learning. In the study, I have used narrative inquiry as a research method, selected six participants purposively from public schools of Kathmandu and collected information from in-depth semi-structured interviews. I have employed multiple layers of thematic analysis, interpreted narrative data and developed six different themes: facility and access, classroom management, language and behavior, classroom activities, feedback and reinforcement and evaluation procedures. On the basis of this study, what I found that school environment, classroom activities, evaluation procedures and feedback and reinforcement are the major factors for the influence of their students' participation. The school management has major role to facilitate and encourage teachers for the promotion of students centered methods such as project based learning and collaborative learning. Along all these aforementioned themes, teachers have prominent role to run active participatory classroom activities through student friendly activities like language games and healthy academic debate. Not only that, teachers are equally responsible to identify at-risk students and address their issues immediately to promote independent learning. Furthermore, to evaluate students' progress, intra-personal comparative evaluation procedure is found more effective than inter-personal comparative evaluation procedures to encourage them to strive ahead with self-respect. The study expects relevant recommendations in the field of content-based child-friendly teaching learning activities where students participate actively enjoy the activities and learn from self and others.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy, Equity, Social justice, Narrative inquiry

**Introduction**

Due to scientific discoveries and advanced technology, societies are being linguistically and culturally diverse. As societies are multilingual and multicultural, schools have linguistically and culturally diverse students and so are the classrooms. In such multilingual classroom, instruction is monolingual or primarily bilingual in case of English language teaching. The difference in language and culture not only affects teacher-student and student-student relationship but also creates some sort of misunderstanding and increase hesitation in students to participate actively and boom in their studies. Central Bureau of Statistics (2014) states, "One hundred and twenty three languages were identified in the census of 2011 out of which nineteen mother-tongues were spoken by 96% ... and 104 languages were spoken by 4 % of the total population" (p. d).Accordingly, teachers have challenges to maintain equity, promote harmony and lead all these diverse students in the classroom activities. As main stream languages are the medium of instruction, L1 speakers of main stream language(s) are more likely to enjoy many more advantages in the class than those of linguistic minorities. They have a more positive self-concept, greater confidence in themselves and a higher status than those who speak minority languages as their L1. They are less likely to experience inferior and discriminated due to the difference in their language and culture. They are easier to motivate than those who are in the reverse position.

Moreover, school environment influences children's learning. Altmann (2015) states Moos' claim that architecture and physical situation of classroom influences students' behavior and learning achievements. In addition to physical setting, surrounding environment influences children's participation. If they feel safe and comfortable or even relish, their participation increases but some of the students feel inferior and uneasy to face anyone or anything in the classroom. As the more a student participates, the better he/she learns, a teacher has to provide additional support to motivate the reluctant ones. Due to various reasons such as language and culture, some students are reducing the ratio of their progress while others are always lagging behind from the beginning. The students who fail to meet the goal are in need of additional support as per their need. Here, the teachers' role is to identify what affects them and what additional support to provide them. In this regard, the study has

attempted to explore how English language teachers make use of critical pedagogy and equity to promote linguistically and culturally diverse students' participation in classroom activities.

### *Theoretical Perspectives*

I have used critical pedagogy to analyze classroom discourse, promote emancipation and transformative learning and discourage oppressive and hegemonic environment. Through policy review, I attempted to explore the gap between the existing policy and the practice. Equality, equity and social justice have supported me to explore the ongoing practices to maintain social justice and recommend the potential options for maintain equity and social justice in English language classroom.

### *Critical pedagogy*

As learning cannot foster in hegemonic environment, critical pedagogy emancipates people from being dominated, oppressed and subordinated. It liberates, empowers and enables the oppressed to proceed ahead independently without any sort of domination. McLaren (1998) defines critical pedagogy as "*a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structure of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society and nation state (p. 45)*". The role of a teacher is to break the power relations and establish fair and justifiable environment. Aliakbari & Faraji (2011) state, "Critical pedagogy challenges any form of domination, oppression and subordination with the goal of emancipating oppressed or marginalized people" (p. 77). People in every society have power relations and so have students in the classroom. Teacher's role is to break off the power relations and maintain equality.

Christie, Carey, Robertson and Grainger (2015) state Mezirow's claim that individuals have difficulty in changing because of their unconscious frames of reference constructed of habits of the mind. As children construct knowledge from school environment and classroom culture and from what they are taught, schools should have child friendly and insightful environment. Transformation occurs only when the learners are convinced that it is true and necessary.

### *Policy review*

Whether to prioritize or trivialize L1 depends on its scope and the benefits it provides. In other words, convergence or divergence of a person's language policy depends on the opportunities and status a language brings with it. As English language has higher status and wider scope, people prioritize it. Nepali is the official language and a course to learn in Nepal. Therefore, English and Nepali languages have higher status and better scope. Sigdel (2017) claims, "Since minority languages cannot facilitate mother-tongue users in their career building, they are ignoring L1 and moving away from it" (p. 24). They hesitate to speak actively due to their L1 accent. National Languages Recommendation Commission, (1994) reports, "The speakers of minority languages gradually tend towards adopting Nepali eventually losing their own mother-tongues" (P. 10). Organizing different cultural programs, schools can promote cultural diversity and encourage the students of minority languages.

#### *Equality, Equity and social justice*

All the students are and should be equal in the eye of the teacher regardless of their socio-economic, gender, linguistic background. In order to link theories with classroom practices, I explored how English language teachers have maintained equity and social justice. I also have made some recommendations for further practices. Equal treatment cannot assure all students' equal results as they have different understanding level and diverse pace of learning. Moreover, students' personal, social and familial situation affects their learning. Some students learn in one shot of teaching while other cannot. The students who are, due to various reasons, slow or unable to meet the minimum threshold require supplementary support so that they can flourish along with the better ones. Castella, Raggazzia and Crescentinia (2012) state that the preventive and compensatory measures implemented in order to guarantee equal opportunities and equal treatment are not sufficient to guarantee equal results for all. In order to promote the students' lingered pace of learning, equity is necessary. OECD (2008) claims, "Extra resources also need to be channeled through schools to help disadvantaged students" (p.7). Education system should trace the paths where students continue learning in their own pace and freedom. In the meantime, collaborative classroom activities to learn from one another are equally important. Castella, Raggazzia and Crescentinia (2012) state Benadusi's (2006) interpretations of equity into six different ideas: pure meritocracy, equal treatment, inter-individual

equality, minimum threshold, equality between social groups and advantages for the disadvantaged (p. 2246). Under meritocracy, rewards should be on the basis of merit. Crawford (2010) states the notion of meritocracy as Australian value that everyone should have equal opportunity to improve their lives and to chase rewards based upon their talent and hard work (p. 4). It can result better students become better and better and get rewarded. On the other hand, the weaker or the less talent become comparatively weaker and weaker and demotivated. Additional incentives and support is a must for them to lead them with the better ones.

Equality is a multifaceted issue. One of them is the opportunity to learn. If all the children have access to learn, they will learn in some extent regardless of their socio-economic situation. Wilson & Berthenthal (2006) state that although students will achieve understanding of science concepts in different ways and at different depths and at different rates of progress, opportunity to learn implies that all should have the chance to develop the understanding... (p. 136). The other issue is including all the students in the main stream of education. Wilson and Bertenthal (2006) states, "Differences in performance across groups (e.g., gender, ethnic, or geographic groups) can be confounded with differences in access to curriculum, instruction, and resources" (p.138). Creation of child friendly environment plays a vital role to maximize inclusion. Wilson and Bertenthal (2006) mention, "States are permitted to provide alternative assessments for those who cannot participate for a variety of reasons in exactly the same assessment as other students" (p. 138). Availability of resources has been a striking issue in developing or underdeveloped countries like Nepal. Accessibility with different resources influences students' learning. If student have access to benefit from any of the resources (textbook, library, online resources etc.), they can learn better. Service is another issue to be addressed to enhance students' learning.

### *Social justice*

Social justice is the fair and justifiable treatment. In other words, it is concerned with fair distribution and equitable treatment to everyone in the society. Ayala, Hage and Wilcox (2009) mention Van den Bos' (2003) definition of social justice as, "the fair and equitable distribution of power, resources, and obligations in society to all people, regardless of race or ethnicity, age, gender, ability status, sexual orientation, and religious or spiritual background" (p. 2795 ). When all the people in the society have

equal access and power, they are less likely to experience inferior and discriminated. Adams, Bell and Griffin (1997) state, "social justice as both a process and a goal (p. 3). Its goal is full and equal participation of all whereas, the process, as they say, is democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change. However, political, cultural and economic aspects affect people's participation in the society.

Diversity in race and culture are the trademark of our society which affect social harmony and influences learning opportunities of students. O'Connell et al. (2009 as cited by Ayala and Hage, 2011) state, "Ethnic minority children and those in low-income households are more likely to experience heightened rates of violence and less likely to live in neighborhoods that offer resources such as parks, museums, and libraries" (p. 2795). Students come to the classroom with a variety of beliefs such as racial and cultural worldviews. These beliefs are the foundation to create prejudices. Unless teachers promote team work, cultivate harmony and create a ground to respect one another, discrimination and domination exist. Teachers should foster equality and inclusion to benefit from this diversity. By creating an environment to support positive behaviors and to promote a sense of belongingness, inequality can be reduced.

### **Research Methodology**

This study has attempted to explore English language teachers' perception of critical pedagogy and equity promotion in lingo-cultural diverse classroom and how they use dimensions of equity (multicultural education, social justice education and culturally responsive pedagogy) to promote social harmony, critical awareness and independent learning. The entire process of the study was guided by my ontological stance of the participants. I have used narrative inquiry as a research method to understand the realities that English language teachers constructed about critical pedagogy and equity promotion. In the study, six participants from six public schools of Kathmandu valley were selected using purposive sampling. The participants are presented with their pseudo names. Building a rapport with the participants, I involved in the dialogical process as per their free time, observed the classes and collected information from in-depth semi-structured interviews. The repeated communication with the respondents facilitated me to generate the understanding of the use of critical

pedagogy and equity promotion in the classroom. Stories of the participants were collected, restored, thamatized and reorganized. Then, I employed multiple layers of thematic analysis, interpreted the narrative data and developed six different themes: facility and access, classroom management, language and behavior, classroom activities, feedback and reinforcement and evaluation procedures.

### **Result and Discussion**

In this section, I had discussed the data with research method to analyze the themes based of the issues of the study. School is the reflection of the society. Students come to school with social norms and values practiced in the society they are grown up. Students, before they come to school, have already learned some sorts of positive as well as negative behavior from their family and society. Turkkahraman (2014) points out, "Schools are the indispensable part of the general social system of the societies. All kinds of innovations and changes in the society or in the world directly have an effect on education and school in terms of process, organization, structure and functional dimensions" (p.381). As Dewey says that the teacher is a skilled professional who must always look to the particular of the child and the environment when designing instruction, teachers have key role to nurture children with positive attitudes and discourage negative ones. The practice of equity in the classroom practices have significant role because they have their authentic narratives. On the basis of the facility and access available in the school, English language teachers can make use of their knowledge and enthusiasm to make use of critical pedagogy and promote equity through classroom management, language and behavior, classroom activities, feedback and reinforcement and evaluation procedures.

### **Multicultural Education to Promote Social Harmony**

The National Association of Multicultural education, NAME (2020) defines multicultural education as a philosophical concept built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity and human dignity. It further states that multicultural education provides the knowledge of the histories, cultures, and contribution of various groups

and helps students to develop a positive self-concept. When people become familiar with different cultures and their diversities within and among themselves, they begin to respect. The study found that celebration of diversity, self-reflection, collection and analysis of +/- behavior, creation of supportive environment, team work are the key strategies the English language teachers employed to promote social harmony.

Celebration of cultural diversity promotes social harmony. Muna, one of the teachers/participants says, *"In order to promote social harmony, I focus on celebrating diversity"*. Teachers encourage students to talk about the cultural or religious festivals and highlight their importance. As school organize cultural ceremonies like cultural dress competition, teachers themselves participate and inspire their students to participate in the competition. As every language and culture changes over time, teachers show diversity in everything due to their advancement, practices and modification with time. The next strategy the teachers used is showing students' negative emotions and asking them to analyze them. Basanta, states, *"When I see a student showing his/her negative emotion, I will ask him/her to explain the feelings. After exploring and identifying their feeling, I ask them whether such feelings are good or bad"*. When asked to analyze their own responses alone, they self-evaluate and get insights. Basanta, as a class teacher led students to prepare 'Code of Conduct' and hung it beside the white board of the classroom. The strategy seemed to work in some extent. Law or code of conduct is necessary as self-reflection cannot always work. Susanti, Suryana & Perdana (2018) state, *"To keep together, schools apply rules that prohibit children to intimidate other students. The goal is to maintain the harmony of togetherness in the school"* (p. 3). Basanta as a strict rule follower further says that he sometimes conducts a workshop on 'Collection of negative behavior and their analysis' and advises them to take a long breath, think a while and analyze their responses. Observation of students' behavior and immediate treatment to the negative ones reduces the chances of conflict. Some teachers observe students' behavior and treat them immediately. Kiran with a calm and slow nature states that the most important thing is school environment. He focuses on the behavior of the people in the school. As he states, *"When children see teachers studying or having a healthy academic debate, appreciating/ respecting one another, children learn the same but they sometimes find the environment unhealthy, some teachers with full of ill tricks, negative attitudes, bullying one another, then*

.....(Translated into English)" From the above narrative, it infers that teachers and school staff themselves promote non-academic environment. The environment from the gate to the office of head teacher conveys message for the students to shape their behavior. The last not the least is team work. School has a team as a whole. Mutual understanding and cooperation among them can bring a change in the school. Similarly, collaboration and support among students can bring a change in their study. But this has not been implemented. Despite Teachers' role to form group and lead their team effort to achieve the goal, they are found to follow the traditional ways of teaching. When student work in group, they learn from one another. But the effort of the concern authority (school administration, school management committee, and local government) is insufficient to create environment of social harmony and facilitate teachers to use different teaching strategies. If the teachers are encouraged to use different techniques like project based learning and differentiated instruction, they can help learners with different needs. Rabin, a teacher dissatisfied with the leadership says, "We have limited resources and time to work with students so we cannot do what we think to do. We should be the role model but no environment to be so". When teachers create diverse topic from different cultural background for discussion, students hesitate less and participate more. Due to pressure to finish the course within certain time and prepare students for the examination, the teachers were found to limit their teaching within the textbook only. As the teachers are treated on the basis of the result of the students, they made their teaching exam-oriented. They provide notes or readymade answers to the students and prepare them for the written examination. Therefore, transversal competencies are ignored. However the teachers were found to run some student friendly activities during the initial phase of academic year.

Bina, a laborious and traditional teacher, runs her classes focusing only on textbook. As she says, "As our parents and management committee want us to teach textbook, we explain each topic in detail, give them a note and prepare them for the examination".

Sabina thinks of running different student friendly activities but teaches traditionally since she has no supportive environment. She says, "Despite thinking of different activities at the beginning of the academic year, I follow traditional way of teaching as it is easy and everyone likes."

**Social Justice Education for Critical Awareness**

The teachers should be critical to promote critical awareness in students. They can raise consciousness about how power relations are constructed and function in the society. Teachers' skill to create environment, use of content and classroom practices influences critical awareness in the students. As Monchinski (2008) state, "critical pedagogy holds that knowledge is a social construction" (p.47), Rabin as an English teacher makes rules and creates a community of conscience. As he said, "*I respect and value every students' voice, opinion and ideas and promote their active participation*", students try their best and create something new. Basanta, as an English teacher said that he makes use of multimodal teaching and learning. Multimodality provides students with different types of resources such as printed and audio/ video. It stimulates learning in meaningful ways within and across disciplines (Papageorgiou & Lamas, 2017) so that students can benefit from any of the choices as per their necessities. Jewitt, (2008 as cited by Papageorgiou & Lamas, 2017) state, "Multimodality in today's classrooms refers to 'multiple' modes of representation, with combined elements of print, visual images and design (p. 133). Basanta said, "*I sometimes ask students to select a speech out of many speeches given and listen to it and work out on it*". Such assignment motivates students to choose a video and listen to it again and again and write what they understand and refine it listening to it again. He further said, "*But my students want to score more in examination so I am compelled to be exam oriented so we focus on providing readymade answer for them.*" When students learn in multiple ways, it reinforces knowledge comprehension. The shift from print-based education to multimodal education is essential not only in teaching learning activities but also in evaluation procedures. Kiran focuses on students' active participation. As he said, "*I usually begin conversation in the class with a question or a problem. I ask them to think a while and write before you speak. I give some clues if necessary so that they find answers*". Muna said, "*I divide the class into different groups and give each group a task. Using different strategies, I encourage everyone's active participation in the group*". When students work in group, they attempt to grow together supporting one another. Rabin said, "*I involve student in real life problem and encourage them to appreciate multiple perspectives and create something new of*

their own". As teachers, during the time between the ending and beginning of academic session, have less workload, time and opportunities to participate in different workshops, seminars and conferences, they implement student- centered methods and run different student-friendly activities. But later, they ignore them and focus on traditional ways of teaching.

Raggazzia and Crescentinia (2012) state, "The concept of equity must include, and at the same time transcend, that of equality, taking up position at a level that is more abstract and of broader conceptualization" (P, 2245). They also state that the concept of equity also includes social justice. Equality promotes the same treatment for all whereas equity is unequal treatment for those from disadvantaged starting points.

Although teachers have students with varied ability at various level of their learning, they have to lead them to meet the goal. Equal support cannot be workable. Minimal support can be sufficient for some students while others may need more support or even repeated support for some. "If equity is not present in the educational system, people could be deprived of numerous opportunities for choice, therefore failing to achieve their full potential" (Maitzegui-Onate & Santibanez-Gruber, 2008 as cited by Castellia, Raggazzia and Crescentinia, 2012). Here, the aim is to compensate for the lacking. Schools have limited facilities and support for the promotion of equity and self-learning environment. As teachers have culturally, linguistically and intelligibly diverse students in a classroom, they should have action packed activities in which students follow the teachers' instruction, enjoy the activities, correct themselves, assess their performance and step ahead. According to Patil, Budihal, Siddamal and Uma (2016), activity based pedagogical teaching learning practices include mid lecture wakeup activities, game based learning, worksheets, simulations, one minurte papers, group discussions, hourly plans, think pair and share, case studies, implementation assignments, quizzes etc. these activities promote teamwork among the students.

### **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

School environment determines students' participation in learning. Culturally responsive teaching is a practice that addresses the imbalance of a school culture that caters to the needs of the dominant culture group (Gay, 2000; McIntosh, 1998; Jay,

2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). Teachers and school staff are the change agent or transformative intellectuals in Giroux's (2010, p. 38) term. They should have the ability to act as change agents in the school as they are culturally responsive to deconstruct the gap of racially, culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse students. Gay (2010) concludes saying, "Modeling in culturally responsive teaching is a moral imperative and a professional necessity" (p.215). As teachers, with positive beliefs about ethnic and cultural diversity, should be supportive and facilitative, Basanta encourages students to learn independently, make their own decision and get self-reflection. In his own words, "I give students problems, clues for the solution if necessary and ask them to present in the classroom". In order to create such environment, teacher is a planner and facilitator. Rabin says, "*I sometimes run language games, sometimes capstone projects, sometimes group, pair or individual work. Such activity based learning are costly and effort or time consuming so I focus on deductive method*". Teachers require additional support and incentives to continue such student centered activities. Due to lack of the support and pressure to finish the course and prepare students for the examination, the teachers tend to follow the traditional ways of teaching. The areas of students' need and interest as well as their talent are isolated in the assessment. As students are assessed on the basis of their ability to answer the questions from the textbook in the examination, the teachers have confined their teaching within the textbook.

## Conclusion

Without police there is chaos, without law there is anarchy, without safety there is catastrophe. Curriculum breaks the chaos by tracing the way to destination; concern authority systematizes school education and the teachers through classroom activities maintain equity and lead the students to flourish with their need and interest. Based on the findings, it is concluded that the teachers have promoted social harmony by celebrating cultural diversity. They have promoted critical awareness by seeking multiple perspectives. As more diversity in the topic of discussion, the less hesitation in the students to participate; the students feel proud and confident when they are asked to speak on an issue from their own culture. And finally they promote independent learning through project based learning and student friendly activities such as language games and working of a video or a document. However, teachers are

directly or indirectly forced to follow the traditional trend to teaching due to the pressure of written examination. The assessment of both academic competencies and transversal competencies on the basis of their performance from the beginning to the end of the academic session can reduce the teacher's pressure to follow the traditional trend. The students' performance on each curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities should be the part of assessment. The outcomes would have effective implications in the field of research, leadership or policy making and stake holders.

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