High School teachers' Experiences in classroom Ecology of Language Teaching: A Study from the Phenomenological Perspective

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Abstract

The present study aimed to look into ecological classroom practices adopted by teachers while teaching English language courses at colleges in Kathmandu, Nepal. The study specifically explained how three high school English teachers in the class felt about ecology of language teaching. Three high school English teachers' experiences were recalled through an in-depth interview. The teachers' experiences in the form of narratives, collected, transcribed, coded, thematic analyses and presented in the notion of emerging themes that English language teaching helped to explore the effective classroom ecological practices in detail. The results revealed that the need of classroom ecology was not emphasized. The study is expected to contribute in making EFL teaching successful in linguistic landscapes of Nepal.

Keywords: Teachers' experience, classroom ecology, community EFL, phenomenological Study.

Introduction

I have multiple roles being an English language teacher. It is an eco- linguistic reader, teacher and learner. In this study I will focus on the exploration of high school English teachers' language learning experiences and integrated ideas in their ongoing teaching context. The concept of language ecology is interconnected in every aspects of language teaching. The term 'ecology 'is *oikos* the Greek word for 'household' or 'habitat', literally the place where a living being resides. In language teaching, ecology of language teaching is the study of any given language and its environment the ecology of the language (Haugen, 1972). Language is conceived in different contexts. Language ecology is related to language variations and language contact, and is influenced by language in education policies, particularly the last

decades of standardized education. Formal English language teaching in Nepal starts from Nursery to university level.

As a multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural country, Nepal has several linguistic landscapes. Haugen (1972: 325) invented the term ecology of language in a seminal paper presented in 1970. According to him , ecology of language as the study of interactions between any given language and its environment' and defines the environment of a language in the following way:

The true environment of a language is the society that uses it as one of its codes. Language exists only in the minds of its users, and it only functions in relating these users to one another and to nature, i.e. their social and natural environment. Part of its ecology is therefore psychological: its interaction with other languages in the minds of bi- and multilingual speakers. Another part of its ecology is sociological: its interaction with the society in which it functions as a medium of communication. The ecology of a language is determined primarily by the people who learn it, use it, and transmit it to others (Haugen, 1972: 325).

It arguably supports with the idea of Einar Haugen who was Norwegian- American Scholar, who focused on the interaction between multilingual speakers of society. Nepal is the land of different linguistic landscapes, the several aspects of language teaching has been observed. The practice of English language teaching was started from the time of Rana rule from Durbar High School hiring English trainers. Now this language has been taught from the first grade as a compulsory subject in Nepal and this continues at least up to Bachelor level in formal education. The use of English has been used in various purposes in the context of Nepal, the views of language learning and it diversity that plays an important role in it. Mühlhäusler (1996a: 2) takes this one step further:

The ecological metaphor in my view is action oriented. It shifts the attention from linguists being players of academic language games to becoming shop stewards[3] for linguistic diversity, and to addressing moral,

economic and other 'non -linguistic' issues. In this case, the real understanding of the classroom situation is essential for the component for the language ecology. The features of linguistic Nepal is unique, the sense of unity in diversity has direct impact of learning and teaching in our country. Nepalese classrooms have been consisted several backgrounds of the bilingual learners. Apart from that, the teachers' identity, knowledge, and values always emphasize in order to contextualize the learning for the ecological point of views.

Regarding the concept of ecology, a number of educational researches have been conducted by the researchers for the last decades in the views of educational experience in ecological terms (e.g., Blocher, 1974; Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Doyle, 1977; Hamilton,1983; Tudor, 2001; van Lier, 1996, 1997, 2004): That is, they conceive of educational settings like classrooms as establishing mechanism which is similar to biological ecosystems, and propose that research focus on the relation- ships among the various elements present in the classroom environment. I have integrated the above mentioned the issues in relations to classroom ecology and steps of language ecology for the bilingual learners in the multilingual contexts.

A classroom is a microcosm of society. Different backgrounds of the students having age, sex, ethnicity, abilities, and previous experience with the subject come to learn together. On the other hand, Teachers' age, sex, knowledge and their experience as well as the resources available space and equipment used in the classrooms have great impact for the effective language learning (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974). Behavioral dynamics of classroom is the clear example of using classroom ecology in multilingual contexts. Language classrooms have the important external and internal relationships among the various classroom environments. Students' language is used according to the environment, situation, and interpersonal dynamics. Sometimes, they mixed the language, if they do not understand (Hawkins, 2004; Orellana & Bowman, 2003; Paris, 2010; Syafryadin & haryani, 2020).

Ecological practices involve engagement between the learner and the environment and enable the teachers to learn language teaching practices. The confirmation of classroom settings could be helpful in order to confirm that classroom-based research and real understanding of ecological practices whether they are employed or not. Such issues are very much crucial to have discussion in the context of Nepal.

To the relevant answers of the mentioned questions .I have used the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1976) as the theoretical stand of my research which allows building fundamental relationships with their students and creating a communication rich classroom that involves the parents. Conceptualizing the classroom as an ecosystem allowed us to ask the central question posed. ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) theories propose that youth learn via their social interactions in the multiple contexts they navigate daily above in terms of the relationships between learning the language and other elements of the context: the human players (learners, teacher); forms of interaction, notably classroom discourse; organizing forces such as the curriculum; and so on. The basic priority of this paper is to highlight the classroom ecology and its implications in the different landscapes of the students and contexts of language learning environments.

Research Methodology

Keeping these things in mind, I carried out a qualitative study. It aims to understand the subjective world of human experience (Stickler & Hampel, 2015), see real-world situations as they are (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009), and hear silenced voices about particular issues (Creswell, 2007), so it could help me to understand language learning and teaching environments as perceived by my participants who were involved in the study (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010). Further, the qualitative study attempts to capture a particular experience and can result in a richer description and a deeper understanding of the experience (Stickler & Hamper). In this study, the social

phenomena were related to the teachers' classroom activities which they implement in the classrooms.

While conducting an in-depth exploration of the phenomena, I specifically approached the study adopting a phenomenological inquiry. The fundamental points of the inquiry are the life world, which is "the world that is lived and experienced respectively" (Gee, Loewenthal, & Cayne, 2013 p.53), and the notion of intentionality, that indicates "human consciousness is always and inevitably related to and directed towards something beyond itself. Therefore, there are always a subject, an object as a well as a process connecting them that we call as consciousness" (Deurzen, 2014, p.55).

I reflected some criteria to select my research participants in a phenomenological study. A research participant has experienced an intended phenomenon, is intensely interested in understanding natures and meanings of the phenomenon, and willing to be involved in a lengthy interview (Moustakas, 1994). In the study, it is also necessary that I need to find one or more individuals who can articulate their lived experiences in the process of learning (Creswell, 2007).I conducted the study to explore the lived experience of teaching while teaching English language in bilingual context in which I limited the number of my research participant

Participants to involve in this study (Kastuhandani, 2011) and involved purposeful samples (Fletcher & Cox, 2012) of 3 high school English teachers who have been experiencing as teachers and dedicated for the profession development for the effective learning environment. It will be a source for my rich data to explore the lived experiences from the participants. More specifically, they were representatives of three different schools in Kathmandu Valley. For a noble purpose, all the participants were pseudonyms: *Him, Vim*, and *Nim*. In essence, engaging the teachers who could provide detailed descriptions of the experiences they had undertaken was more beneficial for the study, from which their descriptions were purposely non-generalizable than recruiting participants randomly (Hickman

& Kiss, 2013). Therefore, I could acquire in-depth information specifically from those who were in a position to give it (Cohen, Manion, & Morisson, 2007). The lived experiences of English teachers' experiences were recalled through an in-depth phenomenological interview. It is a topical-guided and an informal interview asking open-ended questions to interviewees (Moustakas, 1994). Further, it has an explicit intention of asking questions focusing on their experiences (Henfield, Woo, & Washington, 2013) and encourages them to think of situations, persons, or events for it asks what the experiences are like (Manen, 1990).

Keeping the things in mind in relation to an ethical consideration, I contacted the participants to explain purposes of the study and to ask them to sign a consent form before I started the interview session online. It was difficult to meet as the COVID-19 and all of us need to maintain the physical distancing .After obtaining the approval electronically, I explained the issues on classroom ecology and ongoing practices ideas about the classroom ecology related open-ended questionnaire consisting of questions to be asked in the interview based on interview protocols I have prepared, and to ask them to write their answers. This activity was done for I assumed that the participants could have some time to reflect their learning experiences in a less anxious way (Mambu, 2014), therefore, the teachers could the descriptions of their experiences in the interview session. I conducted the interview in English language participants so that they could ensure that they could provide clear and profound responses to all interview questions.

Most were developed from Manen (1990), Utami (2010), and the relevant literature discussed in the introductory part. The rest was "probing questions I raised either in-situ as the researcher was interviewing the participants or before a follow-up interview" (Mambu, 2016, p.166). In fact, the idea of understanding teachers' experience as a lived and perceived phenomenon is also related to how they interpret their classroom tasks and the influence of experiences in their past classrooms to their present classes (Prentiss, 1995). Therefore while conducting interview, the researcher

encouraged the teachers to recall their experiences with classroom ecology and practices chronologically, so that they could provide as much about the experiences as possible (Hickman & Kiss, 2013.Each interview took place for 20-35 minutes and was recorded using a voice recorder. Then, the recorded information of the interview was transcribed and analyzed.

The collection process of teachers' lived experience materials through the interview; the researcher adopted the data analysis guidelines (Creswell, 2007, p.159) to analyze the data. Firstly, I started describing personal experiences with the phenomenon under the study where researcher began with a full of description of the teachers' experiences while teaching English. Secondly, I developed a list of significant statements. Then, reading the interview transcriptions and found statements about how the teachers experienced their classroom practices. After that, I underlined and listed the statements. Thirdly, the process of taking the statements and then to group them into larger units of information, called meaning units or themes. I perceive themes as "the sense we are able to make of something, in which the I try to put into words what something means to me then it will be produce theme-like statements" Manen (1990, p.88). Fifth the process of describing what and how the teachers experienced the phenomenon and to include verbatim transcriptions extracted from the interview data(INW) through they produce in-depth understanding and interpretations of data" (van Manen, as cited in Pratt, 2012, p. 14).Further, my study discussed on the descriptive parts of the ecology of language teaching and it's classroom implications for the effective learning contexts. I described the themes of my study, integrate to the intended study and, analyze the participants' lived experiences in themes will be sources for the right adaptation of real ecological practices for the language teaching , it will have a greater impact on the sustainable teaching and learning

Findings and Discussion

In this section, I debated on ecology as language teaching and ecology as language learning as the main themes .Under main themes, there are sub - themes which depict the lived experiences of teachers for marinating the effective classroom ecology.

Findings

Ecology as Language Teaching

From the teacher's perspectives, my participants have responded that School and Community based organizations function significant role in organizing the effective environment for teaching language in multilingual contexts which are presented as follows:

School: an ecological context for teaching

School is an ecological context where all the teachers offer number resources for language leaning. School is understood as one of the valuable learning platform and ecological context and environment. School creates the place to embrace the linguistic skills and resources that bilingual students use Borrerro & Bird (2009). Here is the response:

Excerpt 3

"I engaged all the students in the language teaching with the application of resources, guidance and assignments during the school hours. I noticed the bilingual leaners that were divided into some groups. The regular interaction in school and learning activities promoted me to learn the new trends of teaching and learning activities.(Nim/INW3)

Excerpt 4

"I usually chat in my share my knowledge with staff and other sources available in the school. My friends sometimes also ask one another to find particular learning materials dealing with motivation in language learning. I ask help one another in the meeting and other school activities." (Him/INW4)

From the above mentioned experiences, the teachers learn the

language teaching by participating family and community based organizations. They also learned with their staff to negotiate different perspectives that they had during school hours, as an example of solving real-world problems (Edutopia, 2008). Both of my participants agreed that school has been proved the center for all types of learning activities that they collaborate in the school. It was an innovative idea to engage the real situation of classroom teaching.

Community: Participating the learners

Community has been one of the authentic ecological agents for the language learning which offers the real experiences. Children learn the languages with their community based activities, take active participation in sport organizations, after school programs, riding, shopping .These activities are key factors for the effective learning environment. Further, understating the real situation of the classrooms enables the teachers to share the challenges and solutions to overcome them. In my study *Nim* and *Vim* recalled their experience, which clearly instances the concept of the community based organizations which can offer them to have learner-centered participation that encourages student to share responsibility for their learning (Lingua Folio Network, 2014).

Excerpt 8

"I participate in the different community based organizations such as NELTA, British Council, and TESOL which help me to share the ideas with the students. I encouraged the students to participate in school programs, riding, shopping for language learning. This really helped me to understand the real role of the community in the language learning." (Nim/INW11).

Excerpt 9

"I also suggested the students to work in cooperative manner as they belong to different community group members. They have multiple stories of participation in social activities including the school related

activities."(Vim/INW12/).

Based on the above mentioned responses depict that while teaching language in the classroom activities are affected by the active participation of community based organizations such as British Council, TESOL and other learning opportunities. The data clearly illustrates how *Nim* and *Vim* are encouraged by the principal to participate in the school activities and community based organizations, and how Vim and Nim can share their participation in community based organizations help in teaching language. Engaging the teachers in such organizations is beneficial for my participants and encouraged to participate actively. The above mentioned issues are based on the classroom practices from ecological perspectives while teaching English at high school as perceived by English teachers. Specifically, the study was to answer the following research question: what does classroom ecology of mean to the teachers in learning English Language teaching and learning? It was evident that I had to explore detailed teachers' personal experiences with classroom ecology. This situation indicated my limited control over the exploration Malilang (2013).

Ecology as Language Learning

Learning takes place regularly all creatures. Ecology as language learning is associated the backgrounds, values of the learners. In the process of classroom teaching, teacher need to be aware of students' educational, religious, economic, social, cultural aspects really matter in language learning and teaching. Families and schools are the central microsystems interacting with youth's organized out-of- school activities. Research on families highlights the importance of coordination across settings. Parents are more likely to support and encourage their children when the goals and norms of the activity align with those of the home setting (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017).

As well as capturing the interrelatedness of classroom life, an ecological approach, along with the notion of affordances, also

acknowledges the complex nature of causality (see also Larsen— Freeman & Cameron, 2008). The language learning of my participants is based on the teaching experiences of lived experiences by the teachers extracted from the interview data registered four major themes as the meaning of classroom ecology, as implemented in the classroom projects, to learn English teach English courses at colleges in Kathmandu valley. The themes of the study are family, peers, school, materials and community which promote the learners to learn the language as well as support in maintaining the classroom ecology. As my research analysis headed, the importance of this theory is helpful to contribute the in- school and out- school activities and active participation for the learners. The key concepts of classroom ecology sustain in various elements of the classroom. It needs some elements of language teaching in terms of ecological understanding for the further organize analysis. The interaction between teacher and students is the central element   in the ecology of the language classroom: The classroom ecology focuses on relationships between *peers, family, community based organizations* for the effective language learning**.**   My participants are the sources of understanding their lived phenomenon in which ecological system theory may contribute to create the interaction between the teachers, learners and environment in effective language learning. The following responses are extracted from the interview data.

Family/Peers: Sources of learning

Family has also crucial role, in order to provide the real opportunities in learning. One of the participants named *Vim and Him* responded regarding language teaching so that he could use such experiences in the language teaching processes.

Excerpt 1

"I have discussed the multiple realities of language learners and met the peers on how the classroom teaching could be effective. I shared the

individual experiences related to the learning differences of the students with my family members .I also shared the context of classroom management." (Vim/INW1/)

Excerpt 2

"When I meet peers, family members, we discuss about the challenges of learners while teaching English, I also discuss about the eagerness of students and challenges that they are facing for learning" (Him/INW2/).

My participants agreed that they learn the language among the multilingual and context which has facilitated their language learning context. All of them applied some techniques, which can help to enhance their learning motivation (Stanley, 2013), such as Role playing, Group work open discussion with the members, peers. For instance, *Nim* and *Him* informed that they practiced using the role playing games of the language skills to encourage the communication with their group members during the completion of the pros. More specifically, they created a group of students in the classroom when they met to discuss their projects and share any related learning sources for their projects.

Discussion

Simply speaking, the ecology of language teaching is understood as the process of instruction, in which the actions and activities of teachers and learners, the multilayered nature of interaction and language use adopted by the teachers. It is considered as the complexity and as a network of interdependencies among all the elements in the setting, not only at the social level, but also at the physical and symbolic level Lier (2010).The main focus of my research is to understand the real aspects of elements of classroom teaching context. The role of teachers, institutions in the language teaching in the classroom context is inevitable aspect which consists of a number of elements. In the context of language

teaching Lier (2004) describes *affordances* as "relation- ships that provide a 'match' between something in the environment and the learner" (p. 96) or "what is available to the person to do something with" (p. 91). Moreover, the concepts of affordances are understood as the possible steps point of the meaning-making process.

The environment of language teaching and it's components in teaching process. In Ecological System Theory, Microsystem is one of the proximal classifications. It includes the settings in which individuals directly interact. Organized out-of-school and in- school activities represent one microsystem, encompassing different types of activities, such as sports, academic clubs, service projects, and faith-based youth groups Ettekal & Mahoney (2017).

In my research, the meaning-making process is connected in the process of language teaching which is significant to explore the experiences of language learning and teaching in different out of school activities. This is an "active relationship" that involves engagement between the learner and the environment Lier (2004, p. 92). Both the concepts of such framework enable the teachers to learn language teaching practices in the classroom settings

The teachers learn the language teaching by participating family and community based organizations. They also learned with their staff to negotiate different perspectives that they had during school hours, as an example of solving real-world problems (Edutopia, 2008). Both of my participants agreed that school has been proved the center for all types of learning activities that they collaborate in the school. It was an innovative idea to engage the real situation of classroom teaching.

Language teaching reflects the idea to understand the several ideas in the classroom where the real situation of effective teaching is understood. They communicated with their Peers and family members of the teachers share learning resources and multiple aspects of students and classroom issues at home and with peers for ecological teaching. Peers are one of the

important agents of learning the language who promote the relationship outside equally as with the non-native and native English speakers Cummins (1911).The family structure of a learner has a cultural identity and sense of belongingness, authentic home language opportunities through parents.

Implications

The most motivating finding from the study is that classroom ecology has been important with the help of peers, family, school and community for the effective language teaching and learning. In the beginning, I detailed the interrelated connections between ecological components of language learning. The integration of ecology of the language classroom the participants have agreed the role of participant and demonstrated some of the more important ways in which ecological components function to mediate I focused in particular on how family. Peers, school and community have the major relationships for ecological language learning for multilingual/bilingual contexts. Taken as a whole, the findings discussed above suggest certain general conclusions. The importance of peers, family, school and community for effective language teaching and learning is crucial. The extracted experts by the participants responded the ecological issues surface as being particularly important. First, the peers/family members are the sources of learning, second, school is the authentic ecological context of teaching activities, and the third, community is the agency for active participation for the language learning in the bilingual contexts such as in Nepal.

Overall, I would like to stress two points. First, the spirit of empirical research should make us curious about how ecological elements paly vital role in language learning and teaching in bilingual classrooms. I believe that the present study has offered a significant new direction for classroom-based research in language teaching in this regard. Second, the concept of classroom ecology provides a helpful and appropriate way of framing the question of the role of family, peers,

school and community in the second language classroom. Classrooms are highly complex places; given this complexity, as van Lier (1997) in which the concept of classroom ecology offers a real environment and relationships among elements in the class-room, and outside the classrooms.

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