

An Action Research on Classroom Teaching in English Medium

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this paper is to find the problem in classroom teaching in English medium. This paper focuses on classroom teaching problems and the solutions through action research. The main problem existed in teaching students due to their less interest in learning and not paying attention in the classroom. Based on the problem, observation, interview, class work and discussion have been carried out so as to find out the reasons to the problems. Look, think and act for the betterment of classroom teaching and solving the problems have been come out from the research paper. It also shows the transformations process in teaching techniques by making the class student centered with involving them in class discussions, interactions, video show, class work, etc. Moreover, teacher and students use Nepali language whenever necessary so that the teaching is interesting and interactive, which made the classroom teaching and learning effective.

Key words: Action research, Classroom teaching, English medium, Gender and community development, Nepal

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a medium of instruction is popular in universities and colleges in Nepal. Subjects except language subject(s) are taught in English with regard to making students capable of understanding and communicating in English in many colleges. The reason for making English a medium of instruction is to make the graduates get job opportunities within the country and abroad. These days, people's attraction towards learning English has increased a lot. To create such environment English medium schools especially the institutional schools have played significant role. Compared to the community school graduates, institutional school graduates have higher capacity of grasping knowledge in English. It is thought that the products of institutional schools in Nepal have no difficulty in understanding, responding and interacting with their colleagues in English and so all the subjects except language subjects are taught in English and the Gender and Community Development course of Bachelor's level under the Faculty of Arts is no exception.

Teacher believes that students especially in school feel comfortable in learning in their mother tongue. In this context, UNESCO (2011) focuses on children learning better and in an easy way in their mother tongue. Language is one of the most contested issues in education (Liddicoat, 2007 as cited in UNESCO, 2011) especially in a multilingual country like Nepal where children from different indigenous, tribal and minority groups represent (UNESCO, 2007, p. 9). But the concern here is to discuss about English as a medium of instruction in higher level of education. It is believed that all subjects excluding language subjects must be taught in English in university level as a university graduate must have reading and writing, and communicative skills in English. All subjects except language subject(s) are taught in English in campuses and universities of Nepal. Syllabus and

curriculum are designed and developed in English. So, class notes are also provided in English. Textbooks and reading materials in English are easily available and internet access (which is in English language) has facilitated students in their learning.

The Gender and Community Development subject is taught in English. The coordinator of the program instructs the teacher to teach in English medium. However, at the initial stage of teaching it was felt that this technique was not that effective as a majority of students were not interacting in the class. They did not respond to the questions that were asked in the class. Even though, particular students were pointed out for response only few of them responded. Most of the students were yawning and paying no attention in the class. The expectation that the teaching would be efficient and effective was just the reverse. Students were away from their eagerness to learn. Realizing such a situation, a decision was taken to do an action research in order to make students motivated in the classroom so that they will have a good knowledge of Gender and Community Development.

The action research was conducted with the students of Gender and Community Development course of Bachelors level. The total number of research participants (students) was 14, out of which eight were girls. They belonged to different ethnic group such as Brahmin, Chhetri, Magar and Newar. A majority of students had completed their schooling from institutional school where the medium of instruction was English. Based on the following scenario, the main objective of conducting the action research was to identify the classroom situation, existing problems in teaching and learning, and find out possible solutions of classroom teaching in English medium.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study has qualitative research design with classroom observation, interview with students and program coordinator by applying the major process of action research: experiencing (through observation and field notes); enquiring (through asking and questioning) and examining (using and making records). This action research focuses on the changing in attitude, behavior and knowledge of students during the one semester (six months) period. The action research is combining theories from pragmatic philosophy, critical thinking and systems thinking with interpretive paradigm (Wood & Bloor, 2006). The main purpose of this study is to identify the issues that are concern to school education, communities for gathering information and explore possible solutions. The major concern of following action research is to bring improvement in my teaching in the classroom through “providing the means for students to engage in systematic inquiry and investigation to “design” an appropriate way of accomplishing a desired goal and to evaluate its effectiveness (Stinger, 2007, p. 6)”.

Interpretivism is the guiding paradigm in this research with maintaining the reality of subjectivity and guided by a set of beliefs and feeling of the research participants about the medium of instruction and how it should be understood and studied. The ontological believes in the study is multiple reality what we know or rather what we think in classroom teaching. The epistemological notion is how we achieve knowledge or rather how we think we achieve knowledge through interaction in English medium. So, this study is arguing that epistemology and ontology have to do with the essence of knowledge, truth and being. As a researcher, in my action research, it was needed “to recognize that we are part of the social worlds we are studying and researchers’ own interpretative processes and authorial position need to be taken account of” (Freimuth, 2009, pp. 1-2).

Research design of the study is in’ action research spiral structure as Stringer (2007) mentioned in community based action research with research loops around three components:

Look: gather data, define and describe the situation/problem; Think: Explore and analyze the problem and findings; Act: Plan, Implement and Evaluate. Therefore, the design followed the spiral structure for looking the classroom to identify the situation, think the reality after the classroom activities and make a plan for next activities based on student's performances.

The data gathering process is divided into three phases. In first phase, there is interaction with students about their problem and possible solutions. The second phase is guided by the structured guidelines for interaction that was developed in first interaction. Third phase is the stage where look their performance, think for solution and implement the solution that explored with the close interaction with students. The primary data is solely explored with the active involvement of fourteen students studying in bachelor first year.

The teaching technique was student-centered by involving them in discussions, group work and class presentations with change in the medium of instruction and reviews some of its system and procedures to make them more efficient (Guthire, 2010, p. 5). The medium of teaching was both English and Nepali. Although the medium of instruction was English for teaching all subjects except Nepali, sometimes I also applied Nepali language in making students easy to understand and motivate them in classroom teaching and learning. They were also allowed to answer and express their thoughts in Nepali whenever required. Innovative ideas are possible only in one's native language (Agnihotri, 2009, p. 186). The use of audio-visual aids in the classroom also was a milestone in making my teaching interesting and effective.

Analyzing data in this study was funneled through qualitative understanding that necessitates how to make sense of feeling, expression and perception of research participants. The gathered data was analyzed in the six steps involved in analyzing data: preparing and organizing, exploring and coding, describing findings and forming themes, representing and reporting findings, interpreting the meaning and validating the accuracy (Creswell, 2012, p. 237).

The analyzing process of the study was guided by six steps of qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2012) where the data was gathered and transcribed thoroughly. The transcribed data was coded for themes and categories. Under the defined themes, the different literatures were linked with student's quotes. Finally, the result and discussion parts were planned for final shape. Another important task in qualitative research is validating gathered information. So, I reviewed different literature and linked with data that collected in different phase.

3. PLANNING FOR CLASSROOM TEACHING

There were different problems existing during teaching in the classroom. In order to solve the problems, first of all it was necessary to know the reasons of the problems. After knowing the reasons of the problems a planning for solving the problems was done.

3.1 Problem

The main problem was that the students showed less interest in learning. The next problem was that of class interaction. There are many dynamics in classroom interaction that have an impact on teaching and learning processes and among them teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction and teacher presentation are the major ones (Forum for African Women Educationalists, 2005). However, such interactions did not exist in the classroom.

In the Gender and Community Development class, students were not very actively participating in discussion. Out of 14 students only three seemed paying full attention in the class. They were the one who had good command in English. Rest of the students were

gossiping, looking towards the windows of the classroom, taking nap or playing with the cell phone. Teachers should take into account that some students are slow learners; some are gifted and most are better in some areas than others (Forum for African Educationists, 2005). It means that the pace of learning varies individually. It is two hours class and there should be break of 15 minutes during the class. But students preferred not to have break instead asked to finish the class earlier.

3.2 Possible Reasons

There were different methods used to find out the reasons of students being less motivated in the class and get the possible solutions. Being an action research, students were involved in identifying their issues and designing action plan to address the issues. Furthermore, observation, interview and class work were the techniques used to find out the reasons for students' less motivation in classroom with the use of "look, think and act cycle" (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 525).

Observation was one of the techniques used to know the reasons of students less attentive in the classroom. The observation showed that students were less eager to learn. Those who paid attention were just listening to teacher's lecture but not grasping. Such thing was confirmed by asking them questions while teaching and they were exhausted when their names were called. An anxiety appeared in their face when questions were asked. According to Bandura (1991), when learners see situations as threatening, there can be an adverse effect on learning (as cited in Pappamihiel, 2002). Similarly, after being exhausted, they were murmuring in low voice in Nepali and looked at their colleagues. The murmuring meant that that they did not understand clearly what the teacher was teaching.

Interview with individual student was taken to know their view about the teacher's teaching. They reflected that it is not that difficult to understand the subject matter in English. But their main problem as they stated was responding the questions or asking questions in English. They said, "It is not that we do not understand English but the problem is in speaking English fluently while asking questions or responding to the questions. It will be good if the teacher use Nepali along with English while teaching in the classroom so that it will be easy to understand." So the reason for not paying full attention in the classroom learning was the language problem. Although they understood English, it was quite difficult for them to communicate in English. Educators and administrators concentrate mostly on English proficiency as a result; factors such as anxiety are often overlooked in mainstreaming decisions (Pappamihiel, 2002, pp. 327-328). Such was the case in the Gender and Community Developing class.

Class work was one of the tools used for knowing the reasons of students' problem in learning. While teaching, class work was given by dividing them in different groups. The class work was acceptable but problem existed in presenting the group work as they had to make presentation in English and questions had to be raised and answered in English. There was problem during their presentation for selecting appropriate vocabulary and structures in their speech. To solve such problems, interview with the coordinator of the Bachelor's program was made to get suggestion in managing and organizing the class in order to make it interesting and students interacting. From the discussion a conclusion was made that students should be encouraged and inspired to learn by using different techniques such as involving them in group interaction, sometimes talking in Nepali in the class, encouraging them to tell their experiences in the related field, motivating them by showing knowledgeable documentaries, etc. Learning is dependent upon the social interactions that occur in the

classroom and withdrawal from this interaction as a result of high levels of English language anxiety is perhaps the most harmful effect of English language anxiety (Vygotsky, 1978 as cited in Pappamihel, 2002, p. 333). Classroom interaction is a major part of teaching and learning where students and teacher's ideas are shared.

3.3 Possible Solutions and Future Strategies

The possible solution to make classroom teaching interesting and interactive was derived on the basis of the findings of action research. Teacher has to use the experience based on the class observation, interview with the students, class work and discussion with the program coordinator so that students will learn better in the next session.

As per the first problem i.e., students not paying attention in the classroom, a decision was made to transform the teaching techniques. Classroom transformation is necessary from students' and teachers' point of view (CERID, 2007, p. 1). According to the decision efforts were made to make the class student centered i.e., students will be made more active instead of the entire time teacher giving lecture. Before, it was teacher focused as the teacher used to go on lecturing for long time and students were bored. The teacher used to ask fewer questions to students and no responses were received. Next thing was that the teacher used to ask questions to the mass and not pointing to a particular student. Now the teacher decided that she will talk less and let the students speak and ask questions. This will help to motivate students towards learning. As question may be asked to anyone, they will pay attention in the classroom. Another decision to take action was motivating students. The action research on the students showed that they are having problem in communicating in English. So, while lecturing the teacher will apply Nepali vocabulary in explaining and analyzing the subject matter. Along with English, she will also explain and ask questions in Nepali so that the students will feel comfortable in discussion.

Regarding the second problem of not interacting in the class and instead talking with colleagues, using cell phones, a technique of student participation in the classroom will be used. For this, the teacher will lecture for a while then involve students one by one in explaining the context from different perspectives and parameters. The teacher will also ask them to make discussion on what she lectured. The class will be divided into 2-3 groups and give them freedom to choose a team leader in each group responsible for conducting discussion and making presentation later. Keeping in mind that as poor teacher presentation interferes with learning, so does presentation on the part of student (Forum for African Women Educationalists, 2005), the teacher will pay attention on their presentation. For this, half an hour's time will be allocated. The teacher will be out of the classroom while they make discussion. When the teacher will be away from the classroom, students will feel comfortable in discussing in any language. The teacher will also divide the two-hour class into revising the matters taught and learnt in the last class, lecture, discussion and presentation so that they will not forget what they had learnt earlier.

Video show in English in related topics will be a part of the new teaching method. This will help in learning in a joyful way. Moreover, it will also help in improving English as they will listen attentively while watching the show.

A 15 minutes break in between the two hour class will be given so that students will be refreshed for learning. At the starting of the semester, the teacher had asked students whether they want break during the class but they preferred to have continuous class without a break. Instead, they wanted to have the class over half an hour earlier. But the research showed that such type of teaching and learning will not be effective.

The last problem that the students felt in the class was making presentations. They were hesitant to make presentation as it had to be made in English. So the teacher will tell them to make their presentation in English but allow them to use Nepali if they feel necessary. This will help them in explaining and expressing their ideas thoroughly. Finally, the teacher decided to make use of my research findings in the forthcoming session.

4. ACTION

Successful implementation consists of some transformation or continual development of initial ideas (Fullan, 1991 as cited in CERID, 2007, p. 25). So the teacher planned to apply the findings of the research into action in the next semester. The following is the format of the activities in the class:

Table 1. Classroom Activities

Duration	Teacher's Activity	Students' Activity	Peer Discussion/ Presentation	Teachers' input
15 minutes	Ask students to review what they learnt in the last class (in English as far as possible)	Review of last class		Add the missing parts in the review
30 minutes	Ask students to read the slides and explain them in English (in Nepali whenever required)	Listen to the lecture and ask question both in English and Nepali		Explain and make clear to student's questions
	Display of slides and explain it in English and in Nepali if necessary	Explain the slides		
15 minutes			Students make discussion on the presentation in groups (4 groups)	
15 minutes	Break	Break	Break	Break
45 minutes	Ask students to do the presentation	Each group (4 groups) do the presentation (outcome of the group work).	Each group make comments and suggestions on the presentations	Providing input to each presentation and wrap up.
		Students of another group give feedback on the presentation		Talks about what is going to be taught in the next class.
		10 minutes time allocated for each group for presentation plus discussion.		

4.1 Other Activities

The other activity was a documentary show related to the subject matter. The teacher showed a documentary in Hindi, which was translated into English about prostitution and education in a brothel in India. The documentary was one and half-hour long. The students were very much interested in watching the documentary. The documentary was in Hindi language but caption was given in English. So it was easy to understand the documentary in both ways. Students were listening as well as reading the captions while watching it. After watching the documentary, the teacher assigned the task of summarizing the documentary and providing

their input for education to children of the brothel. One week duration was given to submit the assignment.

Next activity to attract students towards the course was drawing a table on the white board and put the heading 'one day activities of male and female students'. Students were asked to analyze the activities. The next day students submitted the home work and the teacher analyzed and explained the difference between male and female's daily activities. But the students (both females and males) said, "There is no such difference between the activities of males and females as nowadays males also help in household work and females also participate in outside activities." In this context, one of the males said, "Our families are educated and females also do clerical work so that males have to help female members in household work." They said so because their families are educated and females also do clerical work. So males have to help them in household work. They took part actively in class discussion as they were allowed to express their thoughts and feelings in both languages: English and Nepali.

One of the assessments to students was to choose each of them a topic from the course and write a paper and present it in the classroom. They were asked to fix the date and topic themselves. Every week there used to be two classes of Gender and Community Development and in each class a student had to make the presentation. The total number of students was 14 and it took seven weeks to complete the presentation. The presentation was made in English and students also asked questions in English. The presenter gave response in English and whenever felt uncomfortable in English they explained in Nepali.

4.2 Observation

My observations of changing my teaching technique and its outcome in the following year were:

- Students were attracted towards teaching and learning and their course as audio-visual aids were also applied in the class. They felt easy to understand the gist and morale of the documentary as the dialogue was in Hindi and captions were given in English. In the first year of the course students were not paying attention in the class as only lecture method was followed. The use of audio-visual aid in the following year attracted students towards teaching.
- The involvement of students in class work and providing them home assignment helped increase their knowledge on particular field. This also further increased their writing skill in English.
- The class presentation of each student on the selected topic within the course helped develop their public speaking ability in English as they were allowed to make use of Nepali vocabulary whenever they felt uncomfortable to explain in English. Moreover, it also contributed in developing their English skill for paper writing. They finalized the paper once their classmates and the teacher commented and made suggestions on their presentation.

4.3 Reflection

The Gender and Community Development class in the second year becomes better as action research was carried out in making the class effective and the findings were applied into action. The teacher modified the teaching method and it was noticed that the students were motivated towards the class. The following are the modifications made in teaching and learning in the second year of the Gender and Community Development subject:

- Documentary show in the class to motivate students towards the course.

In this context, the teaching method was modified as emphasis was given to learning without stress. There were documentary on the related topic shown and students were asked to write the plot of the documentary, give their views and comments in English. In this context, one of the documentaries was related to girls and women prostitution, which was in Hindi but there were sub-titles given in English. Students were familiar with Hindi language and on top of that the sub-title in English made then easy to understand the dialogue. It is mentioned earlier that students just had difficulty in expressing in English not in understanding the written matter in English. They did not have problem in writing the assignment on the documentary in English. But they had some difficulty in presentation totally in English so whenever they had difficulty in explaining, they used Nepali language.

- Group discussion to make every student active in class and share their ideas.

In this case, the teaching method included more class discussions. Students were divided into three groups (five, five and four) that included both gender (male and female) and extrovert and introvert students in each group. One of the group discussions was on Knowledge: its definition, types and knowledge on gender. Each group did both presentation and discussion in English but in some cases they also used Nepali language in explaining the matter clearly. The freedom to make use of Nepali along with English helped to make students active in the class by discussing and sharing their ideas.

- Field visit and assignment presentation in English and use of Nepali if necessary to explain the matter clearly.

Field visit was another activity added in the second year to make students motivated towards learning. The field visit was made in an NGO that worked for the welfare of the third gender. Students collected the required data using Nepali language. But they had to write the report in English, which they did well. They did presentations of their field visit using both English and Nepali languages.

- Students get involved in discussion as the medium of communication is both English as well as Nepali. In one of the classes that included men and women's responsibilities, students were told to do a class assignment individually about their one-day activity. In the next class, they did the presentation of their assignment in English as well as in Nepali wherever necessary. Students were allowed to do so as in the earlier session they had asked for such permission so that they can express their thoughts and feelings more clearly.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After the action research it could be said that in today's educational system students are more attracted towards learning in a joyful manner. Instead of using only the traditional method i.e., lecture method there is the need of involving students in different activities. There is no doubt that English language is important and necessary for all and in higher level of education the medium of instruction should be English. But a student feels more comfortable communicating in her/his mother tongue than in English. So teachers have to come up with new ideas and approaches to encourage students to attend the class, for example they should also use Nepali language in explaining the matters.

Effective teaching and learning is today's need and in order to make it effective and relevant, action research is required. It is through action research that the student problems in learning could be identified. Students' involvement in the action research is must as it helps to identifying the root cause of the problem and finds the appropriate solutions. While applying the findings of the action research as Lin (2008, p. 685) says, motivation, encouragement and interaction are more decisive to a successful teacher than excellent spoken English and intensive knowledge (Lin, 2008, p. 685).

6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Classroom interaction is crucial to the classroom atmosphere. Usually in an interesting, relaxing and fun class, students are more likely to speak more and better (Lin, 2008, p. 685). Problems always occur in classroom teaching as students prefer new techniques that make their learning easier and interesting. It is not that every subject must be taught in English. Along with English, the national or local language could be used to make the teaching and learning motivating and effective. Therefore, every teacher needs to do research on her/his class every semester (Lin, 2008, p. 685). Teachers, even after implementing the solutions after the action research may feel problems in teaching. But they should go on resolving them by modifying the teaching-learning techniques in the forthcoming semester by doing more action research based on the classroom teaching.

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