

## Nepalese EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Pedagogical Capital: A Case Study

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### Abstract

This study explores the perceptions of pedagogical capital of English teachers in the context of Nepal. It aims to examine how the perceptions of pedagogical capital differ and how it affects teachers' performance in the language classroom. Data for this research were collected from 3 participants with varied experiences. The data have been analyzed based on the framework of Stake (1995). The study uses Bourdieu's (1977) notion of cultural capital for theoretical insights. Findings indicate that teachers' pedagogic capital is an ability that can be used in the classroom to facilitate learning process.

**Keywords:** English in Nepal; pedagogical capital; teacher education; pedagogy; English language teaching

## Introduction

I was born about three decades ago in a rural village of Okhaldhunga district. I had a very hard time achieving school education because my school was far away from my home. Due to the long-distance, I was forced to live in a small rented room near the school. I still remember the days I spent with my schoolmates. It was an amazing time for us because we did not have to study English every day. We were taught English only twice a week. Frankly speaking, many of us would bunk the English classes because we never did our assignments. But I still recall the dashing personality my English teacher had. We would be punished physically when we were caught without our assignments. He had a total dictatorship in his classroom. He would teach us using different materials but we hardly understood even a couple of sentences. A full hour lecture was his typical method. We had no autonomy and we were not allowed to ask any question. We had to learn different skills and ideas through our teacher's one-fits-all approach. However, I did attempt my final examination of grade eight despite having a little knowledge about English. Fortunately, we migrated to a town. I joined a public school to continue my school education.

For the time being, I learned developed certain level of linguistic proficiency. However, I was poor in English vocabulary. As time passed, I completed my undergraduate degree. Then, I joined a private school as an English teacher. I always dreamt of obtaining a good position as an English teacher. I focused much on my fluency and accuracy. I always tried my best to be the best kind of teacher; I also knew how to become a good teacher based on my personal experiences. I did not allow my students to talk or discuss in my classroom, rather I dictated every word thinking it was for their holistic development. I did not offer my students the opportunities to interact and generate answers through discussion with their peers. After three months, we held a mid-semester exam and published the results. The results were dissatisfying to me, the principal, and the parents. Then I realized that it was all due to the lack of a student-centered approach. I often devalued their potentials and discouraged pair and project work.

After I faced such a hurdle in my professional career, I devised different skills and strategies. I read and re-read several methodologies and learned different techniques. I began looking for innovative techniques and started using technology to collect reference materials. For example, I focused on internet-based teaching, power-point presentation, lesson plans, and feedback of co-teachers. I made my students learn different types of language games. Thus, I reflected on educational investment and figured out that my pedagogic capital was very poor.

Pedagogical capital is the asset in which teachers' language teaching strategies, ability to motivate students, creation of friendly environment, adoption of new techniques and approaches as per the need and interest of the learners are embedded (Bastola, 2019). Fullan and Langworthy (2014) hold that new pedagogies are more than just the strategies. The new pedagogies include digitalization of classroom culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century which is the demand of our time. They further state that creation of new knowledge requires a dual connection of new pedagogies and digital tools, and these are always expected to be present in today's classroom. Teaching and learning are core phenomena of enhancing partnership between students and teachers where they share, collaborate, and practice with digitally savvy tools. Hence, I wanted to be the best kind of teacher, maintaining digital devices in my classroom.

Bartolo and Smyth (2009) state that the classrooms in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are changing and so are the materials and methodologies. Therefore, the teachers are expected to serve "a high-quality education for increasingly diverse school population coming from different racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds and different abilities which is possible through only teacher education" (p. 117). In a similar tone, Ahmad (2019), in a case study in Bangladesh, states that teacher's values, assumptions, and self-esteem are pertinent in the language classroom. Mannan (2016) maintains that teachers should be accountable for below-average performance and achievement of the students. They should also be aware of the background of the students. Therefore, teachers need mentoring, professional enthusiasm,

pedagogical enrichment. The purpose of this study is to explore the pedagogical capital of English teachers in the context of Nepal. The study investigates the perceptions of teachers regarding pedagogical capital and the implication of their perceptions for English language classroom.

## Literature Review

Two schools of thought describe pedagogic capital. One school advocates that teacher pedagogical capital makes a strong foundation (Henningsson-Yousif & Aasen, 2015) as teachers develop strategies through workshops, seminars, training, and conferences. The other school of thought advocates that teacher's pedagogical capital can be understood through teachers' stories. King and Nomikou (2017) state that pedagogical capital constitutes professionalism; it also improves decision-making capacity. Moreover, teachers' capital always provides opportunities to foster inner potential and advance their career. Teachers' pedagogical capital is embedded within the teaching spectrum which apparently remains invisible. The pedagogical capital has been understood as profound contents knowledge. For Lovat (2003, p. 1) pedagogy is a "a highly complex blend of theoretical understanding and practical skill". A good number of research focus on teachers' pedagogical practices, pedagogic prospects, and teaching strategies in the international context (see Wilson, 2011; Garrity, 2009; Livingston, 2009; Henningsson-Yousif & Aasen, 2015 for details). Other studies such as Male and Palaiologou (2015) and Munro (2007) reveal the effective teaching-learning techniques for achieving pedagogical enhancement.

Some studies explored pedagogical privilege, practices, and their benefits in language classrooms. These studies considered teachers as the storehouse of knowledge that contributes to effective pedagogical practices (Jalongo, 1992). Munro (2007) and Henningsson-Yousif and Aasen (2015) examined how teachers' pedagogical capital can be made visible to enrich and obtain better pedagogical outcomes. These studies revealed that pedagogical well being requires a high-level determination for professional practice and rigorous effort for pedagogical enrichment. Revisiting teachers' practices and their pedagogical well-being demand personal engagement and professional continuity. Teachers who resist change fail to meet the demand of 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms. To obtain pedagogical capital and pedagogic expertise, teachers' reflections and actions are paramount.

## Methodology

The site of my study was Kathmandu (the capital city of Nepal) valley and three EFL teachers were my participants with teaching experiences ranging from primary to tertiary level. Nepal is a multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual country. To maintain a balanced caste representation while selecting my participants, I selected one participant from the Brahmin community (male), another from the Terai community (male), and the other represents the Brahmin community (female).

Pramod was born in a Brahmin family in the eastern part of Nepal called Taplejung. His father was a priest and was literate in Sanskrit whereas his mother was uneducated. He was the eldest kid of his parents and had the responsibility to look after his two siblings. Despite having a painful journey throughout his life he achieved academic success. He became a teacher educator, trainer, and professor of English at one of the universities in Nepal. He earned his PhD and has been teaching English for about 20 years. His goal is to continue teacher training and professional development training at home and abroad. Roshan, the second participant, represents the Terai community. He was born in a Gupta family of the Terai community that lies in the Eastern part of Nepal. His parents were illiterate. Agriculture was their ancestral occupation. There were six children in the family where he was the second eldest. Due to his elder brothers' interest in agriculture, he had to look after his siblings. However, Roshan's father encouraged him to pursue education. Thus, despite the poverty in his family, he succeeded in obtaining educational opportunity. He became a teacher, subject expert, and principal in one of the community

colleges. I received a lot of insights and information from him. Nisha, the third participant, was born in an urban city. She was from a well-educated Brahmin family. Her parents wanted her to study nursing but she wanted to be a teacher. She received support from her family to go abroad for her studies. After completing her studies, she became a teacher and the head of the department in one of the private institutions in Kathmandu. I have used pseudonyms for my research participants, their institutions, agencies, schools, and universities.

I collected data through in-depth interviews and informal observations. Moreover, the talks and interviews were audio recorded. I interviewed twice and the interview sessions generally lasted between 40-50 minutes for every three different participants. The first interview created the opportunity for the follow-up interviews which ensured the contextual understanding of their lived stories. The frequent informal conversations made my data more lively and interesting. Interpretive paradigm is employed to explore teachers' perceptions drawing on their lived experiences, stories, and actions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) in the Nepali context. The researcher, in the interpretive paradigm, is a participant-observer who makes meaning pertaining to field notes obtained from interviews and observations. To analyze data, the framework of Stake (1995) has been used.

## Findings and Discussion

### Content knowledge as a pedagogical capital

Teachers' are believed to be the change agents in the society. Teachers gain experiences and expertise in the course of their teaching tenure. They activate their schema to help students achieve better knowledge and skills. The content knowledge is the core asset that cannot be isolated from teaching-learning activities. Despite having different forms of content knowledge, teachers are expected to demonstrate knowledge on grammar, vocabulary, and literature. Shulman (1987) holds that teachers need a deeper level of understanding of their subject matter. They need to help students connect several ideas across the discipline and with everyday life. Therefore, the vague content can be simplified and communicated to students explicitly. Teaching particular content always demands content specific techniques and methodologies. Moreover, the teacher may bring varied experiences in teaching based on the nature of the content. The stories shared by my research participants were meaningful. Pramod Kumar Sharma, one of the participants with twenty years of teaching experience says: "Effective teaching requires full fledged content knowledge with sincerity and enthusiasm to deliver in the classroom. Therefore, every successful teaching interacts with contents, engages with students and determines the overall output of the academic course". He believes that teaching without content is like a bird without wings because teaching without content makes no sense in the classroom. He says:

Content knowledge is a fundamental basis for teaching. Effective content knowledge is always meaningful and long-lasting. I sense that every teacher must be able to contextualize their content. In doing so, teachers require expertise. They gain a lot of experience. So to say, content knowledge is an important thing for the teachers to make a meaningful impact on his/her students.

It is believed that teachers with the enthusiasm for teaching content are humble, diligent, and rich in content. They are dedicated, passionate, academically sound, and psychologically energetic in their work (Sammons, Lindorff, Ortega & Kington, 2016). Thus, the teachers are expected to make a balance between the need and aspirations of the students along with the content knowledge and its delivery. Roshan Kumar Gupta who has fifteen years of teaching experience from Montessori to Masters says "Content is the heart of teaching, part of learning and art of living. It is prescribed by an exam board to institutionalize the disseminated knowledge. So, I often deliver content knowledge following lesson plans". He states that every teacher opting for better delivery has to have proper planning and preparation of content for his/her students. Here, Roshan's ideas are closer to the idea of Avidov-Ungar and Eshet-

Alkalai (2011) who point out that content is the heart-core of teaching, part of learning and medium of evaluation in which the content is replicated via a specified plan of a lesson to be taught thoroughly.

Similarly, Nisha Sharma, with twenty-five years of teaching experience says, “I believe content and teacher both are imperative. They are important for successful teaching-learning. It creates positive vibes in the classroom”. Her opinions are similar to Avidov-Ungar and Eshet-Alkalai (2011) who hold that the essence of the course is content. They argue that content knowledge is paramount to teaching which needs to be full of factual information and thought-provoking ideas based on evidence in a particular area of the subject taught. Teachers’ delivery must match with the fact.

Content knowledge perceived by all the participants was similar. They interacted with different students in different settings in different ways and generated unique ideas about content knowledge to deal with students in complex situations. The findings of this study are reinforced by the findings of previous research studies (e.g. Jolongo, 1992; Munro, 2007; Henningsson-Yousif & Aasen, 2015) that revealed the significance of content knowledge. The findings of the previous studies were focused on teacher expertise in their content course that transmits knowledge. The participants admit that their content knowledge was heavily influenced by their ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu, 1977) since they could perceive the link between the content knowledge and the attitude, skills, and abilities that they practice in their community.

### Methodological skills as pedagogical capital

Teachers who only have sound content knowledge are incomplete because they need focused methodological skills (Oliva, Martinez & Pozo, 2016). The teachers should also be able to cope with the principles of methodology in the language classrooms. Moreover, methodological skill fosters learning. The teacher teaching a particular content should analyze what types of methods are appropriate to impart content knowledge in a meaningful way. For Phelps and Graham (2013), methodological skills are highly sensitive. They argue that teachers learn, unlearn, and relearn different methods for a deeper level of understanding. They gain knowledge while using different method. Pramod believes that the appropriate use of methodology helps teachers minimize the complexities of the subject matter and it also helps them contextualize the content. Pramod narrates, “The use of different methods to teach the same content enriches the interest of the learners. So, methodologies bring completeness in teaching. Moreover, I use methods considering the characteristics of the content and the level of students”. Pramod believes that appropriate methodological skill enhances learning outcomes. In addition, pedagogically sound teachers select the methodologies based on the subject matters or genres to be taught.

However, Nisha does not agree with the fact that teaching requires methods. She believes that teaching without method is also possible. She says, “If I satisfactorily deliver content courses without methods, what's wrong with it? Therefore, I believe that it's not the matter which particular method we employ rather it is important how meaningfully we teach”. According to Nisha, teachers can employ a particular technique or strategy to address learners’ problems in the classroom. On the contrary, for Roshan methodological skill is the fundamental skill that one requires in the profession. He maintains: “I cannot imagine teaching without methodology. The use of different methods to teach the same content enriches the interest of the learners. So, I think skills about methodologies contribute to the holistic development of a teacher”. Roshan’s perception is associated with post method pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Teaching through a single method cannot serve the purpose in the language classroom; therefore, every teacher in the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs to be able to change the method as per the demand of content and context.

### Technological awareness as pedagogical capital

Teaching has been attached to technology. Teaching seems livelier and more interesting with technological facilities. Godwin-Jones (2015) states that language teaching can be made more effective and meaningful by using different types of language learning applications, especially for primary and secondary level students. Therefore, every teacher needs to be technologically aware. Avidov-Ungar and Eshet-Alkalai (2011) indicate that teacher's eagerness to learn about technology ensures better use of technology in the classroom. Pramod says:

I teach my students with a computer. I usually make a power-point presentation and ask my students to present through it to improve their performance. My educational institution provides the Wi-Fi (Internet) facility; therefore, I encourage my students to practice with e-sources.

Pramod also says that his postgraduate students get involved in exploring different online materials. He demonstrates to them how the articles, books, and different files can be downloaded from the internet. He creates a Facebook page and uploads some of the materials so that his students can download and read them. Pramod's view indicates that teachers need to be aware of technological knowledge because teaching requires techniques and those techniques can vary based on content and context. Pramod's perception is similar to Godwin-Jones (2015), and Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2014) who state that educational institutions should have internet facilities. Nisha, like Pramod also uses technology in the classroom. She says: "I often use technology in my classroom. Sometimes, I use a laptop, computer, and cell phone in my teaching because it helps generate ideas. I transfer different useful documents and files to my students via Bluetooth or the internet".

Nisha maintains that learners need to be exposed to e-resources so that they get a chance to upgrade and update them in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She believes that technological awareness is significant for imparting knowledge among the learners. Therefore, teaching a particular content using some techniques with technological equipment enriches teaching-learning atmosphere. For the successful dissemination of knowledge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, every teacher needs technological awareness because technology has made the world a global village. However, Roshan shares a negative experience: "I use technology in my classroom but the in our context learners, especially in the lower grades, do not have internet access". Nevertheless, he holds that every teacher needs to be technologically sound. Thus, the technologically skilled teacher can use PowerPoint slides and online resources. Previous studies (Godwin-Jones, 2015; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Avidov-Ungar & Eshet-Alkalai, 2011) support the perceptions of the participants of this study. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century teachers need to be technologically efficient.

### Experiences as pedagogical capital

Ringo (2006) maintains that the ability to create learner-friendly atmosphere is connected with experience. Pramod says, "Experience is the best teacher. It teaches every teacher to teach and every learner to learn. It is the asset of an individual that should not be overlooked". Pramod learned about methods and approaches, received training, and attended different educational conferences. Thus he learned administrative, academic, and management skills. He also learned how to motivate students. Unlike Pramod, Nisha has a different understanding about the role of experience in teaching. In particular, Pramod gained his pedagogic capital from his early life experiences in the village. Nisha did not have such experiences, because she grew up in an educated family. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the pedagogical practices of Pramod and Nisha. As Nisha narrates, "I gained experience from a private school; I learned different skills and strategies. I also gained experience from Tribhuvan University and from abroad". She says that the culture she learned and the professionalism or collegiality she developed—everything helped her to be what she has become today. She rarely uses the lecture method.

Nisha states that teachers' experiences that they gain from their professional practices make a significant contribution to the accumulation of pedagogical capital.

Roshan says that every teacher has the stories of success and failure. He recounts, "I experienced difficulties in life. My father wanted to send me to school. Since there was no public campus [in the village], I rented a room near the campus for my higher studies". Roshan acquired diverse range of experiences as he began teaching in a private school. He also learned different skills from the school. The school teaching taught him about methods, approaches, lesson plans, materials, and classroom management techniques. He learned to use appropriate methods in the classrooms. Thus he could acquire pedagogical capital.

### Self-esteem and reflection as pedagogical capital

Teacher's self-esteem, confidence, and reflection are significant in improving learners' proficiency. Teaching means sharing, transferring, and exchanging knowledge (Klnl & Podolsky, 2016). Teaching becomes effective when we develop self-esteem and reflect on ourselves. Pandey (2012) holds that reflection is an educational practice. It prioritizes planning and preparation. Similarly, Richards and Lockhart (1994) believe that teaching must always be reflective and the reflection involves beliefs, attitudes, and value systems. Reflection includes both emotion and cognition. Pramod narrates, "I start my class from brainstorming. I review the contents of my previous class for a couple of minutes and then open the floor for discussion on some relevant questions from the topic I that I will teach". Pramod also says that that every teacher has to reflect on what they teach in their class as reflective practice makes the class lively. Pramod's understanding is related to Pandey (2012) who states that reflective practice makes teaching interacting and lively; it also maximizes the strengths of the teachers. For Nisha, people cannot be teachers unless they have passion, confidence, and reflection. She remarks:

I spend the first five minutes in revising what I taught yesterday. The reality is that teaching requires passion, confidence, and reflection. I assess the performance of my students after each lesson because continuous assessment helps them build confidence in content knowledge.

Nisha maintains that the ability to reflect is a pedagogical capital. In addition, teachers' devotion, dedication, self-esteem, confidence, and passion are valuable assets. For Roshan, self-esteem is a pedagogic capital. He maintains: "I asked different questions from the chapter that I have taught and the questions helped me evaluate myself if I could teach the content properly". Thus, without self-esteem, a teacher cannot teach effectively.

### Conclusion

Teachers gain pedagogic capital by learning, unlearning, and re-learning. The accumulation of pedagogic capital is connected with cultural values. Pedagogical capital includes methodological knowledge, technological awareness, and content knowledge (Jolongo, 1992; Munro, 2007; Henningson-Yousif & Aasen, 2015). Experience of the teachers and their self-esteem help teachers generate pedagogical capital. Teachers' pedagogical capital improves analytical thinking and creates scope for professional development. The findings of this study indicate that practice and dedication are the prerequisites for actualizing the potential of teachers for classroom instruction.

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## Ethics Statement

I, hereby, state that I conducted the research and prepared the manuscript following the protocol of research and publications ethics. I am solely responsible if any deviation or mistake (in content and language) is identified in the manuscript.

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