English Language Teachers' Professional Journey and Construction of Their Identity

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ABSTRACT

Given the widespread concentration on beliefs, values, emotions, critical incidents, and practices in exploring teachers' professional identities, this study presents the trajectories of identity construction of three English language teachers from Nepal, analyzing their storied lives from schoolteachers to university professors. For this purpose, the article considered the three-dimensional professional development model forwarded by Padwad and Dixit (2014) to explore the effective mediation by the state agencies, culture and the policies, appropriate support from the organizations, and the bottom-up initiatives taken by the teachers in their professional development. Besides, the professional development journey derived from the in-depth interview of the participants is analyzed by employing Wenger's (1999) communities of practice, particularly engagement, alignment, and imagination, as theoretical categories to discover their professional identities. The analysis revealed that passion for language, creativity, and motivation to learn English during childhood initially encouraged them to study English. In addition, inspiration from their teachers during their schooling and later a competitive working environment motivated them to experiment with innovative teaching approaches and establish themselves in the profession. Furthermore, diversification in university teaching according to university requirements and resultant divergence from the professional root ultimately transformed their identity beyond English teachers. Finally, university policy, customization of teachers

as per the university requirement, and their survival strategy as English teachers in a university where technical subjects are given more priority has impacted their professional identities.

Raj, Maya, Chand, and I

In this article, I present the storied life of three in-service English language teachers, namely Raj, Maya, and Chand (pseudonyms), from a university in Nepal. Though initially from the remote hilly regions of Nepal, all three teachers have achieved considerable success in their teaching-learning practices and established themselves in English language education. All three teachers have some commonalities: they started their teaching careers in institutional schools, gradually progressed in teaching, and eventually secured teaching positions in a university. Accordingly, I also initiated my teaching career in an institutional school, joined a university as a full-time lecturer of English and communication, and achieved promotion to tenure track Assistant Professor's position within two years of joining the university. Soon after, I joined my Ph.D. in English language education to research teacher professional development and identity construction. Mainly, I am engrossed in how identities are constructed and negotiated through narratives. Meantime, I was impressed with the stories of Raj, Maya, and Chand: so, I requested them to involve in my research project as participants, and they readily accepted it.

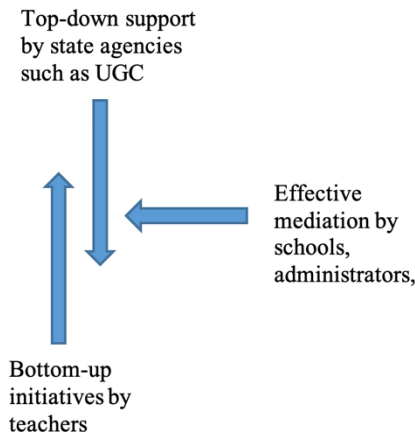### Teachers' Professional Development and Identity

The participants shared the stories of their professional development (PD) journey, particularly their growth from novice teachers to university professors. I understand TPD in line with the definition of Padwad and Dixit (2014). They consider TPD "a planned, continuous, and lifelong process" carried out by teachers not only "to develop their personal and professional qualities" but also "to improve their knowledge, skills, and practices," which in turn contributes to empowerment and improvement of their agency and thereby "development of their organizations and their pupils" (p. 10). I further explored the aspects of TPD to become acquainted with Diaz-Maggioli (2004), who argues that TPD primarily aims to improve students' learning and the teaching-learning environment of schools.

Teachers improve their professional skills through TPD activities to cater to the needs caused by the rapid development and ever-increasing

demand for high standards and quality education (Craft, 2000). To develop themselves, as Richards and Farrell (2005) argue, teachers involve in different activities, for instance, self-reflection and evaluation, developing specialized knowledge, expanding knowledge about theory, research, and issues in teaching, and maintaining a collaborative relationship. Teachers get involved in individual, group-based, and institutional development activities employing different development strategies such as self-monitoring, journal writing, critical incidents, teaching portfolios, peer coaching, peer observation, critical friendships, team teaching, journal writing, and workshops, among others (Craft, 2000; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Richards & Farrell, 2005). Through all these works of literature, I got accustomed to different strategies, approaches, and models of TPD; however, I found the three-dimensional model forwarded by Padwad and Dixit (2014) most appropriate for this research.

Figure 1

Model of Effective CPD

Top-down support
by state agencies
such as UGC

Effective
mediation by
schools,
administrators,

Bottom-up
initiatives by
teachers

Source: Padwad and Dixit (2014), p 262

Using this model, I explored how personal initiatives, mediation from the school administrators and colleagues, and school and university policies contributed to the professional development of my participants and the resultant construction of their identities. Similarly, even Day (2011) argues that three different factors – socio-cultural/policy, workplace, social context, and personal aspects shape teachers' identity. Besides, teachers' involvement and engagement in various activities in professional communities construct

their identities (Teng, 2019). Teachers negotiate with the communities' norms, values, and practices that shape their sense of subjectivity and identity during this engagement.

Teacher Identity

Teacher identity is a heterogeneous concept that we find as many definitions as there are people. Gee (2000) defines identity as "being recognized as a certain kind of person" (p. 99), whereas Pennycook (2001) considers it "a constant ongoing negotiation of how we relate to the world" (149). In line with Pennycook (2001), Norton (2000) defines identity as how one defines his relationship with the world and how that relationship develops across time and space. Day (2011) further adds that we should not perceive professional identity as a role; instead, we should consider identity as how we perceive and present ourselves to others. Different aspects like emotional contexts, experiences, beliefs, values, and practices influence professional identity. In addition, communication skills and strategies, attitude, knowledge, and personal biography also impact teachers' identity (Miller 2009).

With these conceptual definitions in mind, I reviewed some of the currently available research studies on English language teachers' professional journeys and the construction of their identities. The review result showed that a significant number of study is conducted on the identity construction of English language teachers ranging from the influence of race on pedagogical choices and, thereby, identity (Charles, 2019), to the impact on the teaching-learning environment, particularly on identity construction through activities in communities of practice (Nguyen & Dao, 2019), the influence of identity construction in teacher education programs (Villegas et al., 2020), the impact of sexuality (Lin et al., 2020) and action research (Meihami & Werbinska, 2022).

Larger macro contexts, such as gender and race, seem to have a tremendous impact on the identity construction of language teachers. Charles (2019), for instance, in his exploration of the lived experience of self-identified black ELT practitioners in Korea, revealed that race played an important role in how they are perceived. They played the role of cultural ambassadors representing their race and diversity within the western culture, which students found rewarding. In addition, the culturally responsive pedagogy and multiplicity within the English-speaking community they expressed determined their identity. Like race, even sexuality influences the personality of English teachers. Lin et al. (2020) investigated how a queer EFL teacher subjectively negotiated her professional self in tertiary education in Thailand. Their study revealed that despite the perceived fragile situation,

the participant demonstrated agentive power by adapting critical pedagogy in a socially heterosexual-dominated setting that influenced her identity.

At meso level, the engagement of teachers in teacher education programs and the communities of the practice also impact their identity construction. Nguyen and Dao (2019), in their exploration of the process of identity construction of five prospective teachers doing applied linguistics/TESOL at an Australian university, revealed that engagement in new communities of practice in Australia challenged their self-perception as competent teachers in the beginning due to NNEST/NEST speakers' ideology. However, their meaningful engagement in learning communities helped develop their identity as skilled teachers. Villegas et al. (2020) reaffirmed the findings in a similar investigation. They found that though student teachers faced conflict at the beginning of the teacher education program, the program offered ST's experiences for knowledge building and reflection through the members of the teacher community, teaching practicum, and engagement with teacher education curricular activities. The involvement helped STs negotiate their identities as teachers and reconsider their perception of English language teaching. This narrative inquiry has reaffirmed that the teacher identity is a never-ending process requiring participation in social practice.

However, Wang (2021), exploring five first-year EFL teachers' identity construction in China, revealed how teachers face constraints from institutional structures, institutional norms, and external social contexts. As institutional constraints, Wang (2021) argued that heavy workloads, large class size, and examination fixation tradition adversely influenced the identity construction of English language teachers. Likewise, institutional norms like unsympathetic supervisors/leaders, unsupportive staff, inflexible curricula, and inside and outside institutional power have a forceful and undermining impact on their EFL teaching. Similarly, Xie and Dong (2020), in their exploration of identity evolution (crisis) and its accompanying contributive factors of thee experienced EFL teachers over ten years, revealed that experienced language teachers are also vulnerable to identity crises requiring scaffolding to help maintain a commitment to teaching throughout the teaching career. Wijaya (2022) indicated that proactive teaching-learning engagement, developing a rapport with colleagues and learners, and continually rejuvenating identity aligning with institutional demand are essential for identity development. Besides, even action research provides an avenue for ESP teachers to reflect on themselves and consequently develop and transform their professional identity (Meihami & Werbinska, 2022).

Apart from these, a significant study was conducted by Barkhuizen (2016) that examined the imagined identity of a pre-service English teacher in New Zealand by employing a short story analytical approach. This

longitudinal study explored how a pre-service teacher negotiated her identity over nine years to be an English teacher in a prestigious school, a different identity than she had imagined before. This article somehow aligns with my approach to exploring the professional identities of my research participants. In line with Barkhuizen (2016), Liu and Xu (2011) investigated the learning trajectories of an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher from China using narrative inquiry as a research method to reveal how they shifted their identities and adapted themselves to the changing workplace environment. They found that the negotiation of identity is intertwined among different stakeholders and is shaped and reshaped by various power relations in the community. These two articles significantly contribute to my research study methodologically.

Though significant research studies on TPD and identity construction are available in other contexts, the paucity of such research studies is evident in the Nepali context. Yadav (2011), for instance, explored how English teachers utilize blogging as a resource for professional development in Nepal. He has highlighted how ten different professional development strategies forwarded by Richards and Farrell (2005) can be applied through blogging for professional development without much economic investment. Similarly, Negi (2016) conducted a survey of English language teachers from the Far-Western and Mid-Western parts of Nepal, revealing the requirement of context-specific training and teaching-learning methodology that abreast the global practices and the latest developments in ICT for enhanced pedagogical practices. Likewise, Shrestha (2011) studied the potential use of mobile technology in English language classrooms in Nepal. In addition, Poudel (2018) conducted action research and concluded that need-based training for foreign language teachers is likely to transform classroom teaching-learning practices. These research studies primarily focused on TPD; however, identity construction through professional development is uncharted territory in the context of Nepal.

Therefore, it is imperative to explore the identities of English language teachers by examining their professional development journey. For this purpose, I employed narrative inquiry as a research method as it explores 'educational experience as lived' (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This narrative inquiry provides insights into the status of English language teachers from Nepal, thereby contributing to the professional development plan. In addition, reflection on the professional journey enhances self-understanding by making teachers realize their current position as English language teachers. Besides, this study also significantly contributes to identity discourse in the context of Nepal. In subsequent topics, I present the relevance of the communities of practice (Wenger, 1999) as a theoretical referent, the

relevance of narrative inquiry to explore identity, trajectories of identity construction, and finally, the conclusion and implication of the research.

Communities of Practice

Wenger's (2010) notion of communities of practice (CoPs) theoretically informs the analysis of Raj, Maya, and Chand's professional development journey and construction of their identities as CoPs presents how individuals and society constitute each other. Wenger (2011) defines CoPs as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (p. 1). Koliba and Gajda (2009) consider CoPs the critical strategies for professional development and organizational change. Three defining characteristics of CoPs include community members with a commitment to a shared domain of interest, community members who interact and learn together, and a community who develop a shared repertoire of resources (Wenger, 2011). Teachers engage in diverse activities such as reflection, interaction, and other forms of participation and reification as members of CoPs. In addition, teachers produce varieties of artifacts such as concepts, methods, stories, and other forms of reification that represent their shared experiences. Thus, learning occurs in mutual interaction, participation, and reification.

During this process, the participants develop and grow mutually. Participation takes place in temporal and spatial dimensions. Farnsworth et al. (2016) note that identities that teachers create during their engagement in communities are temporal/spatial concepts – that teachers "become a person out of a whole series of experiences over time" (p. 1) and the clues that the social world offers them about possible futures. They argue that identity formation occurs at two levels: how you express yourself and negotiate in the community during engagement and how others recognize you as a member. In other words, how you see yourself and how others see you define identity. Thus, identity construction is both a social and personal issue. Wenger (2010) argues that "identification is both something we are actively engaged in negotiating and something others do to us. Sometimes the result is an experience of participation; sometimes of non-participation" (p. 6). In other words, teachers are constituted by both what they are and what they are not. Wenger (1999) maintains that teachers' identities reflect the landscape of their experience in communities of practice where they are involved in engagement, imagination, and alignment.

Data Generation and Meaning Making

As narrative inquiry allows researchers to represent teachers' experiences holistically with the complex situatedness of their learning environment (Webster & Mertova, 2007), the narrative approach becomes pertinent to exploring teachers' identities. The study remains within the

interpretive paradigm of research where storying and re-storying are co-construction between the participants and the interlocutor. I explored the participants' stories of their professional journey through semi-structured in-depth interviews and informal conversations with them. Participants' mother language was used to communicate during data collection. The interview was recorded by obtaining oral permission from the participants. Then all the recordings in Nepali were transcribed and translated into English. The English transcripts were coded using a generic coding method forwarded by Saldana (2016) that consists of first cycle coding to make meaning of the data and second cycle coding to develop patterns and themes out of the initial codes. Theme development and narrative construction were also informed by micro, meso, and macro perspectives of categorizing narratives as envisioned by Barkhuizen (2016). Finally, the themes developed within the micro, meso, and macro contexts of the stories are presented in a logical sequence while re-storying the participants' experiences. So, the final presentation of the findings is predominantly narrative. Furthermore, to confirm whether participants' stories are rightly interpreted and re-storied, the initial draft of the article was sent to them before submission for publication.

PARTICIPANTS' NARRATIVES

Childhood Environment and Passion for Language

A thorough analysis of the lived experience of Raj, Maya, and Chand at the micro-level revealed that passion for language, motivating childhood environment, and love for creativity encouraged them to involve in English language teaching. For instance, Raj believes that linguistic intelligence, love for the sound of language, and job prospect motivated him to join English language teaching. In addition, his father's stories of learning English, his communication skills, and cursive handwriting also inspired him to learn English initially. Therefore, he was engrossed in English language and literature since early childhood. In addition, a teacher from Shillong, India, who taught grammar and crafted sentence structures with fair kindness during schooling inspired him a lot, which fueled his passion for writing.

Likewise, even Chand had a strong passion for language and literature. He wanted to harness his creative potential in writing stories and poems. Chand argued that as the teaching profession could provide plentiful opportunities to interact with students, read child psychology, and understand the ethos and pathos of teachers, he joined English language teaching. He has written a couple of stories and poems based on his classroom interactions. He considers teaching a compatible profession for aspiring writers as it offers ample opportunities to interact with students and teachers, which could be a

subject for writing. In addition, teachers get enough opportunities to play with language that directly or indirectly enhances their writing skills.

Also, Maya's childhood family environment has substantially influenced her professional career and identity construction. She was born in the Hilly region of Nepal and brought up in Hong Kong in a family with a military background where strong discipline and punctuality are considered assets, and that value is inculcated and reflected in her professional career. Maya argued:

> *As my father had an army background, I was raised in a solid discipline. And this background has influenced my professional career as well. I'm also a disciplinarian. I'm punctual, and I feel that it's my value. I believe in leading by example. If I'm punctual, then only students become punctual.*

Punctuality and discipline are the assets and values of Maya as a teaching professional. She reminisces a friend of her introducing her as a "most feared" teacher in a guest lecture program, though she perceives herself as a "disciplinarian." Interestingly, she recalls with hilarity that her students have given her the nickname "Hitler." Her identity as "disciplinarian," "most feared person," or "Hitler" is constructed out of the influence of her childhood upbringing. Apart from professional values, her schooling in an English medium school in Hong Kong developed a strong foundation in English. From a very young age, Maya developed a habit of watching English programs, reading English magazines and novels, and using English for socialization in the communities and among friends, consequently forming a solid base and passion for learning English.

In addition, the schooling environment heavily influenced the teaching-learning approaches of teachers. Mainly two British volunteer teachers' innovative approaches to teaching English during Chand's schooling heavily influenced the pedagogical choices in his school teaching. Those volunteer teachers engaged students in writing poems and stories, stimulated students to participate in diverse activities, motivated them with incentives such as pencils and chocolates, and involved them in other creative activities with fun. Getting inspired by them, Chand also wanted to engage students in fun activities with motivation and encourage students to learn. However, as he did not receive enough resources, environment, and autonomy to apply his creative potential for teaching, he resigned from his first school. He mentioned:

> *I also wanted to engage students in creative works. But there were no instruments, neither cassette players nor videos. YouTube was not in*

existence at that time. Neither management preferred activities nor an environment to engage students in creative activities. Because of that, I did not like to work there. I resigned within a year.

An analysis of the storied life of Chand revealed that his pedagogical choices are inclined by his passion for creative writing and the influence of two British volunteer teachers during his schooling. Similarly, during the formative phase of his career, the working environment influenced Raj immensely. Raj, who started his career as an English teacher cum hostel warden in a private boarding school, was compelled to communicate in English at school premises throughout his tenure, which positively influenced his speaking. His passion for developing linguistic competence made him over-conscious about developing linguistic skills, mainly speaking. Raj notes that he is a "happy-go-lucky kind of person" with inconsistency in work; however, he grew from the stage of a mentee through independence to the phase of creating a signature as an English teacher. He noted:

> *Now I'm on a stage to create a signature. The pedagogical tools that I practiced are worth a book that I'm about to complete a compilation. I might have borrowed this from communication, technical writing, rhetoric, literature, managerial/organizational communication, and human resource management issues. But what I say is, this is the time to claim my signature. Over the years of practice, I'm thinking of writing a book on classroom practices. I have already compiled it as alternative taxonomies in which I have developed 20 different pedagogical tools. I can claim that to be mine.*

Though Raj entered the university as an English language teacher, his engagement in different activities and disciplines shaped his identity and pedagogical approaches. The university environment has heavily impacted him as an English teacher, similar to home. The "alternative taxonomies" that he has developed reflect his 20 years of practice in the university in diverse roles and teaching responsibilities.

Stories of Raj, Maya, and Chand's involvement in different communities of practice, be it as a family member, student, or teacher, have heavily influenced their identities as English language teachers (Wenger, 2010). Raj grew up with his father's stories of learning English and later working as a hostel in charge in an English medium school, whereas Maya grew up in Hong Kong in an English environment. Their family environment influenced both of them from their early childhood, which led them to be English teachers. In addition, their families' and teachers' values during schooling have also heavily influenced their identities. Besides, Maya and

Chand imagined their identities with someone they met during their childhood (Wenger, 1999, 2010). For example, Maya identified herself with her father and projected herself as a strong "disciplinarian," though her colleagues understand her as the "most feared" teacher and students consider her a "Hitler." Likewise, Chand identified himself with British volunteer teachers and tried to use creative means in his pedagogical practices. In the same line, Raj devised repertoires and pedagogical tools resulting from participation and reification in communities of practice that defined him as a teacher (Wenger, 1999). His proposed alternative taxonomy described him as an "innovator" and "creative practitioner."

Competitive Environment and Innovative Approaches to Teaching
Participants' stories revealed that they constantly worked in a competitive environment and with ever-increasing demands of the students, where they had to devise innovative approaches to teaching both to outsmart competitors and, at times, to be compatible with students' expectations. Raj noted that when teachers from Darjeeling, Sikkim, and refugees from Bhutan with Christian mission school backgrounds were in high priority, he had the challenge to outwit them. Hence, he devised a way to be loved by students by harnessing his creative potential to outsmart competitors. Raj argued:

> *I was curious to be loved by the students, and when you want to be loved, you must devise a method. And the best thing would be to, in a way, trigger creativity in them and mostly tell stories and devote my time to mix up with them. I used to sing, recite poetry, and make them write and tell stories.*

The competitive environment in school teaching and Raj's survival strategy made him explore his creative potential further and devise innovative approaches to teaching-learning. However, as those teachers had fluency in spoken language due to their schooling in English medium Christian missionary schools, they were privileged. Private institutions had great faith in them, and therefore, they were somehow pampered by schools so that other schools would not be able to lure them by raising existing salaries. He further added:

> *If I compare myself with them, they did not have the challenge of developing themselves, the tendency of developing themselves, because they were the hotcakes. If one school threw them away, another school would hire them.*

These teachers always enjoyed the privilege of having good oral communication skills. Because of that, they did not tend to develop themselves.

However, Raj always had the challenge of developing himself to establish in teaching. Probably because of the competitive environment and zeal for continuous development, he was given classes up to the secondary level. Due to this, his colleagues were somehow jealous of him. One of his colleagues had started peeping into his lessons with bad intentions; therefore, the Vice-Principal had alarmed him in advance that the jealous friend could harass him. Instead of getting scared, he worked hard and took the leverage of getting the help of his teachers in the college as he was doing a Bachelor's degree. He reported as his principal was saying:

> *At least two people would come to check on you and try to harass you at times. These people with bad intentions will talk ill about you, not to the principal or me, but to the founders, because they want to harass and defame you. Instead of getting scared of them, I thought I should prove myself. I developed a tendency to establish myself due to the competitive environment.*

Raj always took this kind of challenging environment positively and worked hard. Even the Vice-Principal always supported and motivated Raj during his school teaching, which encouraged him to exercise autonomy in pedagogical choices and other crucial classroom decision-making. In line with Raj, even Maya and Chand utilized teachers' autonomy and developed themselves by employing different development opportunities. Chand recalled his teaching experience in a secondary school in Kathmandu, where he could exercise teacher autonomy to use different pedagogical approaches. Raj used to involve students in creative activities, project-based learning, drawing, poetry competition, and writing essays based on the observation of the surrounding environment when teaching-learning used to be primarily dominated by the grammar-translation method. However, he argued that his approach to teaching could be influenced by the genre of writing (literature) he was teaching. He remarked:

> *In general, my ways of teaching depend on the content. When I teach a poem, I usually involve students in recitation and engage them in writing vocabulary on board one after another student. When one writes a word, another could give contextual meaning by exploring it in the dictionary.*

In this way, his approach to teaching English was student-centered, participatory, and activity-driven. In the same line, Maya argued that she opposed parrot learning. From the beginning of her teaching career, Maya engaged students in discussions by inviting them to express their perspectives on different issues to develop critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills.

Raj also mentioned that he could comfortably play in a given space as he had the liberty to develop resources while working at the university. However, being compatible with high competence students from private schools was a challenge. Besides, he had the challenge of teaching the courses such as technical communication, communication skills, and other courses different from the usual English courses taught at other colleges and universities. Though he was new to such classes, he took training and mentoring from seniors and adapted himself to the changed course and pedagogical approaches. He argued:

> *We offered a complete package of communication skills. The course included listening and speaking as mandatory components with reading and writing. We used to make listening cassettes, make announcements ourselves, read text ourselves and record, and sometimes bring audio contents of native speakers and prepare questions. We needed to be trained to record, mix the audio, formulate questions, and other technicalities.*

As mentioned by Raj, they not only got accustomed to changing environments and new pedagogical approaches to teaching; but also, at the same time, learned to develop learning resources. They struggled to implement the communicative language teaching approach by developing resources. However, they enjoyed the autonomy of designing and implementing the resources. Likewise, even Chand relished the independence of working at university. Chand involves himself in creative writing and research and receives feedback from seniors to improve his teaching-learning, networking, and exploring other development opportunities. He received grant scholarships for presentations in the UK and Cambodia, visited schools and universities there, and interacted with researchers and creative writers, which he considers a good exposure opportunity. In addition, an opportunity for MPhil. degree developed the confidence to work independently.

According to Wenger (2010), our engagement and disengagement with the communities of practice involve identity formation. Further, our alignment and differentiation with a certain kind of teachers define our identity as teaching professionals. Raj differentiated himself from the teachers from Darjeeling and Sikkim by labeling them "pampered teachers" and

"showpieces" for students' attraction. In contrast, Raj projected himself as a "hardworking" and "progressive" teacher who was regularly involved in development activities as he had to prove himself. He even differentiated himself from the teachers from other universities and represented himself as an "innovative and creative teacher" who used new pedagogical approaches to teaching communication. When Chand projected himself as a "creative teacher" who applied an activity-based teaching-learning approach, Maya differentiated and dis-identified herself with traditional teachers who used "lectures" and grammar-translation methods. However, she represented herself as a progressive teacher using the communicative approach and students' engagement to develop critical and creative thinking skills. All the participants represent themselves as "student-centered," "creative," and "innovative" teachers. Chand's identification of himself with his volunteer teachers during schooling (imagined identity) and its role in determining his identity contradicts the findings of Barkhuizen (2016).

Divergence from the Root: I Hardly Breathed English in those Days

According to Raj, the university never appreciated the idea of introducing an English program in its formative period because its focus was on the employability and competitiveness of graduates. Though the School of Education initiated a higher degree in English language education lately, Raj argued, he never saw that opportunity at the School of Arts. Hence, he thought of starting a media studies program and tried convincing the university authority; however, he could not imagine persuading the university authority for the Bachelor in English program. He argued that there was a question of sustaining the program because they could not charge BA in English students equal tuition fees to science and engineering. That's why they offered a Media Studies program because, in Media Studies, English could be a complementary area. As a divergence from the original root of pure English language teaching (language through literature), they took Media Studies as their route. He noted:

> *I hardly breathed English in those days. One or two courses in English, and the rest were Media, Culture and Society, Rhetoric, Cultural Studies, Print Technology, Text and Audience, and Creative Writing. So, that phase with media studies somehow was a complete divergence from what you call the root of English literature.*

Raj's heavy engagement in the Media Studies program during that time was a divergence from the root and a new challenge to get accustomed to new courses. Raj and his colleagues gradually customized themselves according to the requirement of the degree program. One of their colleagues joined the

postgraduate program in Journalism, while he joined M.Phil. in English. However, he took media studies as the focus.

All the time, he tried to customize to the university's needs. Initially, he was hired at the School of Science and later transferred to the School of Arts, where he felt like he had found his home. He added:

> *They (university authority) hired me in the School of Science and transferred me to the School of Arts. It was ok. We took pride in that. Maybe that was a better transformation and transition. We reached our original home. I felt like we had found our home. However, I got saturated somehow doing media studies and competing with people who came to be original media studies graduates. Then, again I realized English was my root, and by doing English, I could do many things.*

He got saturated and disillusioned quickly by teaching Media Studies courses and competing with the faculties specializing in Media Studies. Then he realized that English was his root, and by doing English, he could do so many things. Though he considered that English was his root, he denied calling himself an English language teacher. Raj believes that English language teachers should diversify themselves and create an avenue in the university. He believes that the humanities department is in crisis as it has been relegated and given a secondary position for 27 years in the university. Hence, he wishes English teachers to grow and establish the tree of humanities where English will remain as a branch. He confessed:

> *I don't call myself an English language teacher. I call myself a scholar in English who teaches English as one of the vocations. I don't teach English alone. I might be teaching rhetoric, technical communication, and intercultural communication. Please call that intercultural communication; that's not English. English is just a medium. Maybe you have some input from your exposure to the English language, but mostly what you are doing is humanistic. My rhetoric is that the tree that we are growing is the tree of humanities; under the shade of that tree, English comes as a branch.*

His rhetoric depicts that in his struggle to create an avenue in university as an English teacher, Raj moved far beyond his root and started teaching predominantly communication-related courses. His divergence, or what he calls "diversification," is also evident in his commitment to support faculties working under the department that he established, where more than 25 faculties of humanities and management are involved. He expressed his

commitment by saying: "I want to work for the team, not necessarily English teachers." However, he wished to see the number of Ph.D. in English growing and expects that these English teachers will not just involve in what traditional English teachers are doing: "present tense and past tense, Milton and Shakespeare." He wishes English teachers to diversify themselves and do multiple things beyond usual teachers. He wishes for plurality as well as point of convergence among them.

In these discourses, it is evident that Raj is gradually disidentifying himself as a traditional English teacher. This dis-identification with the learning communities and alignment with the regime of competence of humanists (critical thinking, creativity, reasoning, and interpersonal competence, among others), as noted by Wenger (1999), involves identity work. And this identification is rooted in the history of practice and the relationships with community members. He was hired at the School of Science, transferred to the School of Arts but worked with media studies people, and now working at the School of Management. His involvement in diverse responsibilities ranging from media studies teacher, an administrator, and other multiple accountabilities has greatly influenced him. Because of this, he does not consider himself a usual English teacher. He has internalized this well and explicitly claims: "*I'm no more an English teacher.*" Raj relentlessly customized and submitted himself according to the university's needs, which Wenger (1999) and Fainsworth et al. (2016) consider the alignment with the unwritten laws or the university environment. This endless customization which Raj believes is "diversification," may be understood by others as a divergence from the root or an existential crisis as an English teacher. Now he considers himself more a "humanist" than an English teacher. Stories of Raj reaffirm the findings of Wang (2021), who presents how institutional norms or unwritten rules of the institution affect identity construction which also reminds Xie and Dong (2020), who argue that even experienced language teachers are vulnerable to identity crises requiring scaffolding throughout the teaching career.

Being in the Margin

Raj felt that his university's English language teachers' community was in the minority and sometimes in the margin. He felt like the university never kept English teachers in priority for their development and growth. He claimed:

> *English language teachers' community was sometimes in the margin. Being considered a minority was not a big problem, but sometimes feeling like being in the margin was a problem in the sense of, seeing no career growth, especially seeing no further education opportunity.*

> *English fraternity hardly received any development opportunities abroad; however, our contemporaries from other departments enjoyed the privilege. They received development opportunities in India, Korea, European countries, and America, but English teachers hardly received such opportunities.*

Working as an English teacher in the School of Engineering, they were never in priority for education abroad. English teachers had to look for their avenues, develop avenues, and seek counseling, advice, and training from the English fraternity from other universities. Early enough, the university authority had told the faculty members that entering the university Masters' Degree was enough; however, to get a promotion, they required more. Raj mentioned:

> *We need more, but there is no opportunity to get more. So, what would we do? We, all the time, had to take counsel or advice from our gurus from ABC University (the name of the university changed for the anonymity of the participants) like we were all the time taught by the ABC University fraternity.*

Raj expressed his dissatisfaction as he did not receive adequate development opportunities and exposure. Though the university administration clarified the requirement for development and growth, they hardly received opportunities in the university.

In line with Raj, even Chand expressed his reservations. His reservations are related to the lack of a clear policy regarding a tenure track position and formalization. As non-tenured faculties are deprived of the provident fund, gratuity, and other benefits, they remain disadvantaged. A tenured appointment is also a matter of prestige for him. He believes that there must be a vigorous criterion for publication and experience for tenured positions in the university. Once they fulfill those criteria, they should be promoted and tenured without prejudice. Though Chand simply expressed dissatisfaction against injustice, Maya was involved in teachers' association to fight against the management for impartiality and the establishment of professional rights and development. She argued:

> *I was also involved in the teachers' association as the administration did not treat all the faculties equally. They did not provide equal opportunities to all. Hence, we established the Professors' Association. Due to that, we had a tussle with the management. But our main motive was to develop our professional rights and the*

institution's development. I'm the founding member of that organization.

This way, the university environment has shaped her identity as a rebel. Maya also feels guilty as a professor of English for her inability to establish an English department and specialized program in English. She expressed:

As a professor of English, I have a guilty feeling. I have reached this position and taught at this university for a long time. However, I'm not able to establish my discipline at the School of Arts. Now I have come to the right place. Previously I was in the School of Science, and even the context was inappropriate. But after arriving at the School of Arts in 2013, I thought that I was in the right place and would establish my discipline here.

Working as a professor of English in the School of Arts, she now aims to establish an English department, and she feels guilty about not being able to do so.

Her determination to establish a department is also motivated by her desire to assert her identity. Despite this, she extends credit to the university policy for her higher studies. She expressed:

After joining an institution, everyone has an ambition for promotion, and the university has its policy for the promotion of faculties. These policies also push you for development. I did both MPhil and Ph.D. due to that reason. That's one part. If the university did not have that development strategy; probably, I would not get these degrees. Policy demanded this.

Maya expressed her gratitude for providing an opportunity to pursue MPhil. and Ph.D degree. In the same line, Chand noted that due to the development opportunity provided by the university, particularly MPhil., he has developed confidence and has improved teaching-learning practices and professional activities.

Farnsworth et al. (2016) argue that identity is not only about how you express your competence in the community; it's also about how others recognize you as a member or not. Raj had a sense of being in the margin working at the School of Engineering, where English was just a foundational course. This sense of marginalization also emerged because the university sent his colleagues teaching core subjects of engineering abroad for development and higher degrees, whereas the English fraternity hardly got any opportunity. Even Chand and Maya feel the same. Because of this kind

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of unequal treatment, Maya was instigated to join the teachers' union for their rights. So, she has also developed her identity as a founding member of the professors' union. As Liu and Xu (2011) argue, the negotiation of identity is intertwined among different stakeholders and is shaped and reshaped by various power relations in the community. However, Maya is determined to establish an English department in the School of Arts as the department can be instrumental in asserting her identity as an English teacher. Stories of Maya reveal how unequal treatment of faculties may lead to rebellion against the institution and how it determines the identity of the faculty.

Conclusion and Implications

Summing up, exploration of the lived experience of English language teachers from Nepal reflected the impact of three different layers of professional development context – micro, meso, and macro – in identity construction. At micro level, the learning environment at home during childhood and passion for language and literature influenced them. For instance, when Raj and Chand were fascinated with language and developed a passion for writing during childhood Maya developed an interest in the English language because she was brought up in Hong Kong in an English environment. Even military background with solid discipline in Maya's childhood influenced her to be a strong disciplinarian. At meso or institutional level, the teaching-learning environment at school, the imagined identity they developed during their schooling, and the institutional needs and policies that required professional development to adapt to challenging environments influenced identity construction. Raj and Maya experimented with student-centric teaching-learning methods to adapt themselves to the changing climate, initially using ICT tools. However, due to the lack of their core program and department, they heavily engaged with media studies and communication courses as a clear divergence from their root, leading to the identity crisis. Maya, therefore, still has an aspiration to establish an English department to assert her identity as an English teacher. Working as English teachers in a university where technical subjects are given more priority and English is just a foundational course, English teachers developed a sense of being in the margin. Maya has struggled against the university for equal rights. This study, thus, has implications for the university to make clear policies for the development of teachers other than in core areas. The sense of alienation and marginalization can lead to widespread frustration and resultant revolt, detrimental to the university environment. Inclusive development opportunities for the whole university fraternity are prerequisites for its development.

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