

Working Topic: Casteism and/versus Pedagogy: Promoting Justice through Compulsory English Classrooms in Grades Eleven (11) and Twelve (12) in Nepal

Author Information

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Study Exigence:

This study is the assignment that I wrote for a course while doing the first semester of my Ph.D. at the University of Texas. While doing the course, I was touched by the idea of critical pedagogy. I thought that caste discrimination in Nepal could be addressed/minimized if critical pedagogy had been implemented for some decades. Then, since I had almost a decade of teaching experience in my home country Nepal, I reflected and concluded that I was never trained to practice such critical pedagogy. Therefore, I planned to examine if the prescribed Compulsory English textbooks for grades 11 and 12 challenge one of the social problems—casteism—in the context of Nepal. This study has not been funded, and it is original. It is still in the process; I am planning to do IRB in this semester and collect data by doing semi-structured interviews to the English instructors in Nepal.

Key Theories

Freirean critical pedagogy is an alternative pedagogy that aims at promoting social justice and liberation. As Cho (2012) observes, Freire's pedagogical project makes a call for "the transformation of consciousness from an acceptance of oppression/reality to a belief that reality can be changed" (p. 80). The Freirean educational project is based on a distinction between banking model of education and the problem-posing education: "The former attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness; the latter strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality" (Freire, 2014, p. 81). Here, we can observe Indeed, it is applicable to my paper because my study seeks to develop a model of an alternative pedagogy in Compulsory English classrooms in grades eleven and twelve in Nepal. Moreover, the Freirean problem-posing pedagogy is a form of critical pedagogy that "affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming" (Freire, 2014, p. 84) for the sake of liberation, justice, peace, and progress. It is dialogic in nature. The dialogue in

problem-posing education, as Freire writes, requires three fundamental pre-conditions: “love for the world and for people” (p. 89), “dialogue cannot exist without humility” (p. 90), and “an intense faith in humankind” (p. 91). For Freire, it is authentic education that is “mediated by a world which impresses and challenges both teachers and students and gives rise to views or opinions about it” (Mulcahy, 2011, p. 78). It is where the participants (teachers and students) look at the world/culture as a problem with the motive of transforming it.

According to Bhattacharya (2020), this model facilitates students to reflect on themselves, their communities, and their beliefs critiquing “why things are the way they are in their communities” (p. 404). Hence, Freire’s theorizing of problem-posing pedagogy is “an openness to revisioning, a rejection of passivity” and “critical reflection and dialogue” (Darder, 2014, p. 83). Hence, dialogue, critical reflection, and transformative speculation characterize Freire’s critical pedagogy.

My paper endeavors to explore how Freirean dialogue, critical reflection, and transformative agenda can be applied in Compulsory English classrooms in grades eleven and twelve in Nepal.

The second theoretical lens in my study is the pedagogy of multiliteracies. This theoretical approach aims at incorporating the changes and challenges that exist in society not only in terms of technological developments but also in terms of cultural ethnic and social diversity.

The theory of the pedagogy of Multiliteracies is in tune with multimodality. It is because this approach of teaching “suggests bringing multi-modal texts and particularly those typical of the new, digital media, into the curriculum and the classroom” (Cope & Calantzis, 2015, p. 3). In means multiliteracies start with the situated practice enabling the teacher to connect the classrooms and context fostering a critical consciousness along with the purpose of social transformation. Multiliteracies pedagogy shares borders with reflexivity or reflexive

pedagogy which focuses on “regular returns to student lifeworld experiences” collecting a range of experiences from different sources as an “analysis of interests of people and the purposes of knowledge” (p. 15). It particularly draws upon the concept of ‘identification’, that is Experiencing the Known’: “a conscious, introspective focus on social and environmental conditions of experience” (p. 24). It means, here, the students will be more critical agents. The role of the teacher in the pedagogy of multiliteracies is to be the designer: “Teachers become designers as they select a range of activities they will bring to the learning environment, plan their sequence, and reflect on learning outcomes during and after the learning” (p. 31). In other words, teachers design classroom activities being much more critical of their purpose and goal of educating students. In multiliteracies pedagogy “learning is a consequence of a using series of knowledge actions, using multimodal media to externalize our thinking” (p. 32). There are a number of scholars who speak in favor of the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The concept started with The New London Group (Cazden et al., 1996) which took Multiliteracies as modes of representation broader than language. They argue that “the visual, audio, gestural and spatial semiotic systems are more dynamic and flexible” which go beyond the “rigid and unchanging rules that were related to ‘correct usage’” (p. 10). It means the pedagogy of multiliteracy is multivocal which takes students beyond the language of the linear texts. Hence, “multi in multiliteracies not only refers to multiple literacies and literate practices but also to a growing variety of new texts and new technologies” (Bull & Anstey, 2019, p. 7). It accommodates new cultural and technological developments in the classrooms.

Glossary

The study uses some terminologies in its own context. For example, there are many surnames within the caste ‘Dalit’ in Nepal with some sociocultural differences. However, the term

‘Dalits’, in my study, has been used in a more general sense. It refers to all those Dalit identities who have become victims of untouchability or caste discrimination. The terms ‘untouchability’ has been used in the context of the way ‘high’ castes non-Dalits discriminate against Dalits as untouchable ‘low caste’. The term ‘justice’, in my study, implies a voice and an action against any form of caste discrimination with necessary legal actions against the people who discriminate against Dalits. Likewise, ‘alternative pedagogy’, in this study means critical pedagogy and pedagogy of multiliteracies which aim at promoting justice against caste-based discrimination experienced by the Dalits.

Casteism and/versus Pedagogy: Promoting Social Justice through Compulsory English Classrooms in Nepal

Abstract

This paper argues that the pedagogy in Compulsory English classrooms in grades eleven and twelve in Nepal should promote justice against untouchability and caste-based discrimination that the Dalits have been experiencing. In this study, the phenomenon of caste-based discrimination has been discussed with reference to the two unlawful notorious ‘crimes’ against the Dalit identities like Navaraj B.K. and Rupa Sunar—the former was stoned to death (Mulmi, 2020) and the latter was denied renting a room in the capital city, Kathmandu (Subedi, 2021). Then, after the critical assessment of the Compulsory English curriculum and textbooks of grades eleven and twelve, the paper claims that they remain deceptively neutral and impartial, thereby failing to contribute to a just and an equitable society envisioned by the constitutional and legal provisions that promise justice against all forms of discrimination. Therefore, drawing upon the theory of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2014) and pedagogy of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015), the paper makes a clarion call that a Compulsory English classroom in grades eleven and twelve should implement critical and multiliteracy pedagogical approaches in order to foster the critical consciousness against untouchability and any form of caste-based discrimination experienced by the Dalits. Finally, as a response to the very pedagogical exigency, the study proposes some possible pedagogical imperatives for Compulsory English classrooms in grades eleven and twelve, the two final years of secondary education that are intended to prepare the students for their higher education in Nepal. Hence, the study explores some new approaches of teaching for social justice drives wherein generating space for further research.

Keywords: caste, Dalits, Compulsory English, justice, alternative pedagogy

1. Introduction

It was a beautiful morning when I went to school for worshipping Goddess Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom, art, education, learning, and creativity in Hinduism when I was in grade seven. We, all the teachers and students, prayed together, offered flowers, and asked for blessings. Then, it was time to take (eat) prasad, the holy food prepared for religious occasions. At this moment, sadly, one of the teachers directed the 'Dalit' students to make a separate group and not to touch the non-Dalit students while taking (eating) the prasad/holy food. Some of the Dalit students went home without taking (eating) prasad, whereas some others obeyed the teacher's command. It was the first time I had experienced how 'untouchability' worked even in the institutions like a school in my locality. The incident still haunts me.

Nepalese society is predominantly influenced by caste-based social structure. There exist four castes: *Brahmin, Chhetri, Vaishya, and Shudra*. There are subcastes within these castes.

These castes exist in a hierarchy where Brahmin exist at the top, and the hierarchy descends and locates Shudra at the bottom. There are also many sub-castes within these four castes.

The Dalits belong to *Shudra*, which, in the past and on some occasions even at present, was/is taken as the 'lowest' caste. The caste of a person is visible in his/her surname, and a child belongs to a caste when he/she is born based on the caste of his/her parent. Since the government has also made some special positive affirmations for the Dalits in terms of educational scholarship and employment opportunities, the Dalits normally do not change their family name. For the same reason, the official documents ask people to mention their caste. If people change their family name, the official document still asks for their caste.

Similarly, the caste of people will be known to other people due to their (grand) parents' identity. Ironically, when someone hides his/her caste with a different surname or family name before others, it is also taken as something not normal; when it is exposed later, people start stigmatizing him/her more. Hence, it is almost impossible and problematic to hide one's caste despite the fact that people can change their family name/surname. The situation gets worse when people discriminate the Dalits as 'untouchable' identities in various situations.

This paper is a qualitative study that attempts to promote justice against caste-based discrimination experienced by the 'low' caste Dalits in Nepal. Even though caste-based discrimination is unlawful and punishable by law, on some occasions, the Dalits have been treated as 'untouchable' identities. Therefore, my study seeks to make students speak and act against any forms of caste discrimination experienced by the Dalits through Compulsory English classrooms in grades eleven and twelve. In order to carry out the project, the study analyses and interprets the qualitative data from the theoretical perspective of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2014) and pedagogy of multiliteracy (Cope & Calantzis, 2015). The qualitative data, in this paper, are the legal and constitutional provisions against caste discrimination, the curriculum (Secondary Education Curriculum, Class 11 and 12), and textbooks (English Book: Grade 11 and 12). Analyzing and interpreting these texts/data, the study proposes the ways a teacher can implement critical and multiliteracies pedagogies to impart a critical consciousness against caste discrimination as experienced by the Dalits.

1.1. Conceptual Framework and the Research Question

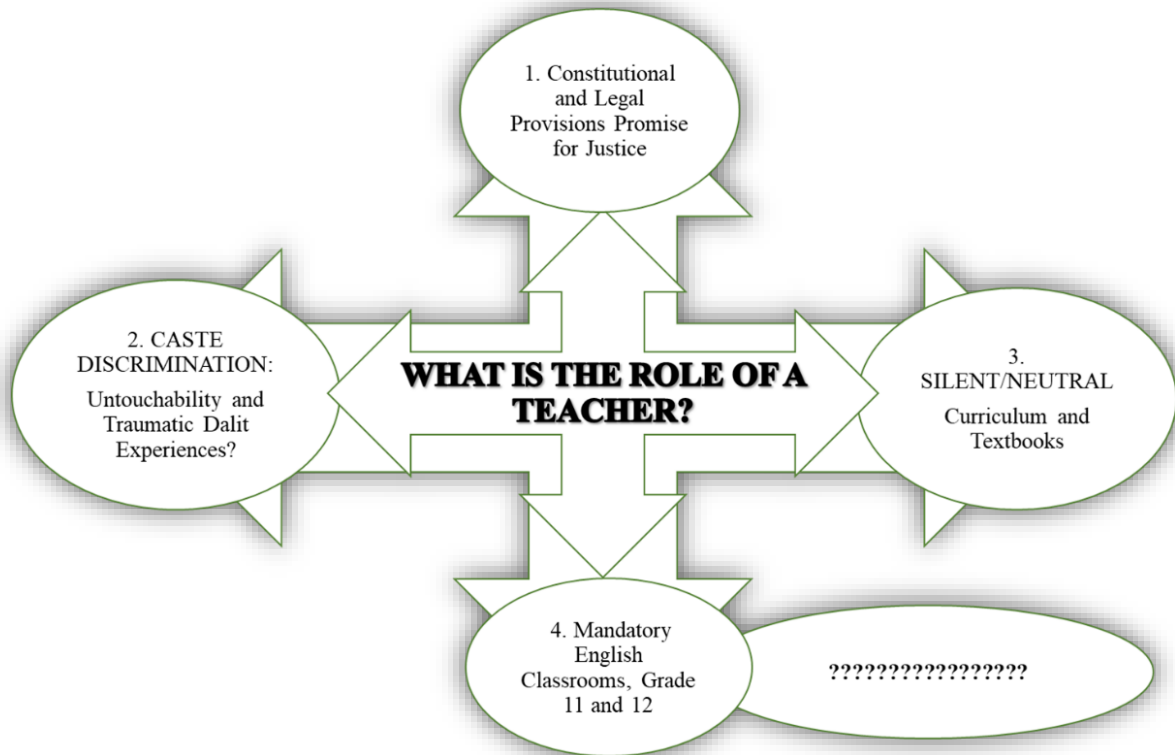
The study not only exposes the exigency of alternative pedagogy but also shows how it is applicable in Compulsory English classrooms in grades eleven and twelve in Nepal.

Therefore, it seeks to plug in two gaps: the gap between legal promises and delivery regarding caste discrimination, and the gap between the Dalit experiences and Compulsory English classrooms of grades eleven and twelve in Nepal. In order to fill in the very gaps, my study proposes the application of critical and multiliteracies pedagogy in those classrooms.

Taking these elements into consideration, I have illustrated the conceptual framework of my study in the following figure 1:

Figure 1

Conceptual framework



Based on the conceptual framework, my paper is entirely an attempt to answer the following research question:

Why and in what ways can a teacher promote social justice against caste discrimination experienced by the Dalits through Compulsory English classrooms in grades 11 and 12 in Nepal?"

Keeping this research question at the center, my study explores the *why* and *how* of the ways of applying critical and multiliteracies pedagogy in Compulsory English classrooms in grades eleven and twelve.

1.2. Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The study has some limitations and delimitations. The very first limitation is that it relies on the documents as qualitative data: constitutional and legal provisions, curriculum, and

textbooks. The second limitation is the application of only critical and multiliteracies pedagogy as theoretical lenses. My study primarily proposes to implement critical and multiliteracies in Compulsory English classrooms only in grades 11 and 12. Likewise, the third limitation of my study is that it basically works with a couple of the Dalit experiences of caste discrimination. Therefore, I believe that if the documents, theoretical lenses, and grades (11 and 12) were changed, the study could take a different direction.

I have also delimited my study. The first delimitation is, while revisiting the constitutional provisions and legal promises, my study concentrates on only the issues of caste and caste discrimination. Likewise, my study also delimits itself while working with the English textbooks of grades eleven and twelve. It means the second delimitation is that, in my study, instead of working with all the lessons, I only show the application of critical and multiliteracies pedagogy with reference to only some lessons prescribed in the texts as an example or a proposal.

1.3. Defining Terminologies

The study uses some terminologies in its own context. For example, there are many surnames within the caste 'Dalit' in Nepal with some sociocultural differences. However, the term 'Dalits', in my study, has been used in a more general sense. It refers to all those Dalit identities who have become victims of untouchability or caste discrimination. The terms 'untouchability' has been used in the context of the way 'high' castes non-Dalits discriminate against Dalits as untouchable 'low caste'. The term 'justice', in my study, implies a voice and an action against any form of caste discrimination with necessary legal actions against the people who discriminate against Dalits. Likewise, 'alternative pedagogy', in this study means critical pedagogy and pedagogy of multiliteracies which aim at promoting justice against caste-based discrimination experienced by the Dalits.

1.4. Ethical Considerations

My study raises the issues of caste and untouchability with reference to the experiences of the Dalits in the context of Nepal. Therefore, since I am a non-Dalit in the context of Nepal, I was/am very conscious of avoiding any stereotyping and misrepresentation of the Dalits. My first ethical consideration is reflexivity which means the discussion of the research issues honestly, without distortion or stereotype (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Secondly, my study is based on triangulation which means analysis and interpretation of more than one source of data and theoretical perspectives in order to answer the research question(s) Flick (2018). In order to respond to these ethical considerations, I went through more recent research works on Dalit identities to the best of my research ability. I have also selected the documents, newspaper articles, curriculum, and textbooks that are readily available in the English language thinking that a reader who comes across my study may want to go through them. Most of the qualitative documents in my discussion are the official ones produced by the government bodies in Nepal. In this sense, my study also corresponds to the quality criteria of reliability too.

1.5. An Overview of the Paper

The study has been divided into six sections. The first section is the introduction which includes the fundamental components of the study setting a background. Having the introduction done here, the next section is 'Literature Review' which engages with the previous research works with the purpose of not only placing my study somewhere within the trajectory but also creating an extension of and departure from those works. The third section is 'Theoretical Perspective' which introduces critical pedagogy and pedagogy of multiliteracies along with their relevance in my study. The 'Methodology' section discusses my philosophical positionality and sources of data. 'Discussion' is the core section where the

study gets its full shape. It not only shows how urgent and significant critical and multiliteracies pedagogy is but also shows some examples of those pedagogical approaches in Compulsory English classrooms in grades eleven and twelve in Nepal. Indeed, this section answers the research question. The final section is ‘Conclusion’. This section sums up the entire discussion, throws light on its significance, and finally shows the spaces for future research.

2. Background Information and Literature Review

This section locates my study somewhere within the trajectory of alternative pedagogy in the context of Nepal by reviewing some scholarly discussions. The review has been done in four thematic domains. The selection criterion of the research works for review has been informed by the research question: *In what ways can a teacher promote social justice against caste discrimination experienced by the Dalits through Compulsory English classrooms in grades 11 and 12 in Nepal?* Therefore, this section fulfils two purposes: (a) to discuss untouchability, Dalit identities, and Compulsory English classrooms in grades eleven and twelve in Nepal and (b) to engage in and extend the discussion creating a point of departure from previous research works.

2.1. The Dalits

Nepal Federal Democratic Republic in South Asia with an area of 1,47,181 sq. km. with a population 29.1 million (291,92,480). It is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural country. However, the Dalits are the most marginalized people who were/are, on some occasions, unlawfully treated as an ‘untouchable’ caste. As of the national census of 2011, the population of *Dalits* was 3030667 (13.09%) out of the total population (23,151,423) of Nepal (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014). The Dalits are known primarily based on their surnames, and the official documents contain information about their caste as ‘Dalit’. Even

though the caste has been mentioned for the purpose of giving some priorities and privileges by the state, they have been seriously marginalized in their communities.

The Dalits experience exclusion in Nepal. As reported in the Nepal Population Report 2011 (p. 167), the Dalits are the most marginalized groups experiencing social exclusion as they have been prohibited from entering a temple, collecting (drinking) water collection from public drinking water resources, inter-caste marriage, and even public gathering. They have been treated as untouchable. They are the people whose human development index is the lowest and they experience gross violations of human (Dahal et al, 2002; Rob, 2002; Kharel 2010). Thus, Dalits are the victims of untouchability and therefore social exclusion in the context of Nepal.

2.2. The Dalits and Untouchability in Nepal

There have been a number of research works against caste discrimination in Nepal. A research report by International Labour Organization (ILO) states that caste-based discrimination against the Dalits has hindered development in Nepal. The report writes that untouchability against the Dalits in Nepal is against the ILO Convention 1958 and Discrimination and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). ILO and ICERD are against any form of oppression and discrimination based on ethnicity, origin, race, and color. Therefore, in the context of Nepal, “Discrimination needs to be eliminated both from the workplace and from society at large so that Dalits can live and work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity” (Consult, 2005, p. xi). That being said, if Dalits experience discrimination, it is necessary to act for justice, freedom, and equality in Nepal.

Similarly, the same exigency has been complemented by other research works too. For example, Folmar (2007), who worked on the issues of untouchability and the Dalits in Nepal

from 1979, writes that the Dalits seek to blur the boundary between ‘higher caste’ and ‘lower caste’ while participating in the political systems in Nepal. After conducting interviews with a number of Dalits in different places (Pokhara, Ghandruk, and Jharuwarasi) in Nepal, the researcher concludes that the Dalits in Nepal have been struggling with a quest for equality. However, the researcher finds that the elimination of discrimination against the Dalits in Nepal “is likely to be slow and painful” because of “a dizzying number of beliefs and practices that cannot be addressed all at once and everywhere” (p. 51). Here, the point is caste system is rooted in multiple levels of social practices and belief systems in Nepalese society. My study, therefore, seeks to address these issues through Compulsory English classrooms in grades 11 and twelve.

2.3. Compulsory English Classrooms in Grades Eleven and Twelve

The curriculum and textbooks designed for grades 11 and twelve are much more recent. They have been revised according to the new revised National Curriculum Framework 2020. The curriculum Development Center Secondary Education Curriculum 2076 B.S (2020 A.D) specifies the two abilities in students after the completion of secondary education. They are: ((a) the graduates, as conscious citizens, shall be able to bear the responsibilities for nation and nationality by incorporating human values and democratic culture; and (b) they shall be able to assimilate them with the international trends of diversity, mutual respect, and co-existence, and play a special role in building an equitable society. Here, we can see that the ability to respect ‘human values and democratic culture’ in order to build ‘an equitable society’ sounds very promising, but, sadly, the Dalits have been experiencing discrimination in society.

Moreover, the subject of Compulsory English classrooms in grades eleven and grade twelve are very important in the context of Nepal. Their significance has been mentioned that “For

some students, secondary education serves as a basis for preparation for the university education, whereas for some other students, it may be a preparation for entry into the world of work” (Secondary Education (Grade 11 & 12) Curriculum, 2076, p. 35). More importantly, Compulsory English is a subject that all students, in spite of their different streams and specializations, have to pass in order to complete their secondary education.

Hence, Compulsory English classrooms are one of the transition points that prepare the students either for higher education or for work in the outer world.

2.4. Exigencies of Alternative Pedagogy in the Context of Nepal

Besides the research on stigmatic Dalit identity, many researchers have worked on how English teachers in Nepal can alternative pedagogy for promoting justice against caste discrimination. In this context, Sharma and Phyak (2017), in their case study, write that critical pedagogy has to strike a balance for social transformation, and it is possible by means of critical materials development, workshops and dialogues. They write: “Nepal continues to endure multiple layers of inequalities in terms of economy, ethnicity/caste, class, and gender . . . [necessitating] teachers’ critical awareness” (p. 215). Unfortunately, their case study concludes that both critical pedagogy and critical awareness are lacking in the context of Nepal. My paper, therefore, proposes some alternative pedagogical approaches in Compulsory classrooms in grades 11 and 12.

Similarly, there has been some research regarding English classrooms in Nepal. According to Tin’s (2014) ethnographic observations of English classrooms in Nepal for three weeks, the English language classrooms in the colleges of Nepal require integration of English language texts and local contexts. Tin argues: “until we know what really happens between people inside and outside the classroom, curriculum innovation and improvement cannot succeed” (p. 415). Here, the argument is that the English language classrooms in the schools and

colleges of Nepal need to interact with the socio-cultural context of Nepal. Therefore, my paper addresses the social ‘problem’ of caste-based inequality and discrimination within English classes as stated in the research questions.

The research works reviewed so far create the background for my research. The reviewed works conclude that Dalits are the marginalized and oppressed identities in Nepal. In the same way, the research works strongly hold that the educational system in Nepal has to address the issues of caste discrimination experienced by the Dalits. They further recommend that English classrooms have to connect classrooms to the outer world. In this sense, my study aligns with these research works. However, my study is more specific, and solution driven. My study, stepping on the problems discussed by the reviewed research works, goes one step ahead. It extends the discussion by proposing critical and multiliteracies pedagogy in Compulsory English classrooms of grades 11 and twelve as an attempt to promote justice against caste discrimination experienced by Dalits.

3. Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical perspectives in my paper are the alternative pedagogical practices. The theoretical lenses have been informed by the research question: *In what ways can a teacher promote social justice against caste discrimination experienced by the Dalits through Compulsory English classrooms in grades 11 and 12 in Nepal?*” Therefore, in answering the research question through analysis and interpretation of qualitative data, the theories which shape my paper are critical pedagogy discussed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire (2014), and pedagogy of multiliteracies discussed in *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Learning by Design* by Cope and Calantzis (2015).

3.1. Critical and Transformative Pedagogy

Freirean critical pedagogy is an alternative pedagogy that aims at promoting social justice and liberation. As Cho (2012) observes, Freire's pedagogical project makes a call for "the transformation of consciousness from an acceptance of oppression/reality to a belief that reality can be changed" (p. 80). The Freirean educational project is based on a distinction between banking model of education and the problem-posing education: "The former attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness; the latter strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality" (Freire, 2014, p. 81). Here, we can observe indeed, it is applicable to my paper because my study seeks to develop a model of an alternative pedagogy in Compulsory English classrooms in grades eleven and twelve in Nepal. Moreover, the Freirean problem-posing pedagogy is a form of critical pedagogy that "affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming" (Freire, 2014, p. 84) for the sake of liberation, justice, peace, and progress. It is dialogic in nature. The dialogue in problem-posing education, as Freire writes, requires three fundamental pre-conditions: "love for the world and for people" (p. 89), "dialogue cannot exist without humility" (p. 90), and "an intense faith in humankind" (p. 91). For Freire, it is authentic education that is "mediated by a world which impresses and challenges both teachers and students and gives rise to views or opinions about it" (Mulcahy, 2011, p. 78). It is where the participants (teachers and students) look at the world/culture as a problem with the motive of transforming it. According to Bhattacharya (2020), this model facilitates students to reflect on themselves, their communities, and their beliefs critiquing "why things are the way they are in their communities" (p. 404). Hence, Freire's theorizing of problem-posing pedagogy is "an openness to revisioning, a rejection of passivity" and "critical reflection and dialogue" (Darder, 2014, p. 83). Hence, dialogue, critical reflection, and transformative speculation characterize Freire's critical pedagogy.

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The second theoretical lens in my study is the pedagogy of multiliteracies. This theoretical approach aims at incorporating the changes and challenges that exist in society not only in terms of technological developments but also in terms of cultural ethnic and social diversity.

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3). According to them, it is based on the four pedagogical practices:

- a. Situated practice/experiencing
- b. Overt instruction/conceptualizing
- c. Critical framing/Analyzing
- d. Transformed practice or applying.

In means multiliteracies start with the situated practice enabling the teacher to connect the classrooms and context fostering a critical consciousness along with the purpose of social transformation. Multiliteracies pedagogy shares borders with reflexivity or reflexive pedagogy which focuses on “regular returns to student lifeworld experiences” collecting a range of experiences from different sources as an “analysis of interests of people and the purposes of knowledge” (p. 15). It particularly draws upon the concept of ‘identification’, that is Experiencing the Known’: “a conscious, introspective focus on social and environmental conditions of experience” (p. 24). It means, here, the students will be more

critical agents. The role of the teacher in the pedagogy of multiliteracies is to be the designer: “Teachers become designers as they select a range of activities they will bring to the learning environment, plan their sequence, and reflect on learning outcomes during and after the learning” (p. 31). In other words, teachers design classroom activities being much more critical of their purpose and goal of educating students. In multiliteracies pedagogy “learning is a consequence of a using series of knowledge actions, using multimodal media to externalize our thinking” (p. 32). There are a number of scholars who speak in favor of the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The concept started with The New London Group (Cazden et al., 1996) which took Multiliteracies as modes of representation broader than language. They argue that “the visual, audio, gestural and spatial semiotic systems are more dynamic and flexible” which go beyond the “rigid and unchanging rules that were related to ‘correct usage’” (p. 10). It means the pedagogy of multiliteracy is multivocal which takes students beyond the language of the linear texts. Hence, “multi in multiliteracies not only refers to multiple literacies and literate practices but also to a growing variety of new texts and new technologies” (Bull & Anstey, 2019, p. 7). It accommodates new cultural and technological developments in the classrooms.

Hence, my application of multiliteracy in my study is a combination of multimodal pedagogy and critical pedagogy.

4. Methodology

This study seeks to fill in the gap between untouchability and pedagogy through Compulsory English classrooms in grades eleven and twelve in the context of Nepal. Again, my methodological choices have been regulated by the research question: *In what ways can a teacher promote social justice against caste discrimination experienced by the Dalits through Compulsory English classrooms in grades 11 and 12 in Nepal?* In order to answer the

research question, the study makes some methodological choices from philosophical implication to data interpretation.

4.1. Philosophical Positionality

The philosophical assumptions, in a qualitative inquiry, are the perspectives of a researcher in the process of carrying out the research (Creswell, 2007). Ontologically, my study is inclined toward constructivism which takes meaning “continually being accomplished by social actors” the qualitative research is his “own accounts of the social world are constructions” (Bryman, 2012, p. 29). Epistemologically, my study relies on interpretivism which is based on the belief that qualitative researchers “grasp the subjective meaning of social actions” in a context (p. 26). Both constructivism and interpretivism are relevant in my study because it challenges ‘caste’ and ‘untouchability’ as social constructs by interpreting or interrogating the qualitative data from a critical perspective. Indeed, the underlying assumptions behind my proposal/application of critical and multiliteracies pedagogy are largely shaped by constructivism and interpretivism.

4.2. Documents as Sources of Data

Documents—both in words and images—are one of seminal sources of information in research (Rapley & Rees, 2018). The methods of data collection for my paper have been informed by the research question and the theoretical perspectives. In order to answer the research question, I have done a qualitative inquiry. The qualitative study includes a critical investigation of some data: constitutional and legal provisions regarding caste discrimination, and the curriculum and textbooks prescribed for Compulsory English in grades 11 and 12 in Nepal. However, since my study is more centered on classroom activities, the textbooks come to be more significant sources than others in the discussion.

5. Discussion: Analysis and Interpretation

In this section, I am going to discuss the exigency of the critical and multiliteracies pedagogy as alternative approaches and the possibility of implementing them in Compulsory English classrooms in grades 11 and 12 in Nepal. That is, this section answers the research question: *Why and in what ways can a teacher promote social justice against caste discrimination experienced by the Dalits through Compulsory English classrooms in grades 11 and 12 in Nepal?* In order to answer the research question, the discussion, has been done in three subsections. Firstly, in order to answer ‘why’, the study excavates the gap between the constitutional/legal provisions and delivery with reference to some unlawful discrimination against the Dalits. After exposing the very gap, in order to answer ‘in what ways’, the study seeks to propose Freire’s (2014) critical pedagogy and Cope and Calentzis’s (2015) pedagogy of multiliteracies as an attempt to promote justice and equity through Compulsory English Classrooms in grades eleven (11) and twelve (12) in Nepal. For that purpose, the study critically reviews the prescribed textbooks and invents some possible critical and multiliteracies pedagogy incorporating the curricular goals and objectives.

5.1. Policies and Provisions against Caste Discrimination in Nepal

In terms of legal policies and provisions, Nepal promises equality. I think it is necessary to start with the constitutional provisions of Nepal. In the Constitution of Nepal 2015, the Right to Live with Dignity has been placed as the very first fundamental right which states “Each person shall have the right to live with dignity” (Article 16, p. 5). Similarly, Article 50 (1), the Directive Principles, envisions “ending all forms of discrimination” by “maintaining communal harmony, solidarity, and amity” (p. 16). When we go further Article 51 (a) also reiterates that there shall be “mutual understanding, tolerance, and solidarity among various caste” (p. 17). Overall, these constitutional provisions emphatically state that the government

of Nepal has guaranteed and ensured the right to live with dignity irrespective of one's caste maintaining social harmony and mutual understanding among the citizens. Since the provisions have been mentioned in the constitution, the ultimate and final law of the nation, any social practices of untouchability based on caste(s) are unlawful and therefore punishable in the context of Nepal.

Moreover, the civil codes also take caste discrimination as a crime. It has also been clearly mentioned on Chapter 3 (Provisions Relating to Civil Rights) under National Civil Code (Act) 2017. Owing to the constitutional and legal provisions, The Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offence and Punishment) Act, 2068 (2011) has also clearly stated the punishment against someone who practices any form of caste discrimination: “the punishment of imprisonment for a term from three months to three years and a fine from fifty thousand rupees to two hundred thousand rupees” and “imprisonment for a term from two months to two years and a fine from twenty thousand rupees to one hundred thousand rupees” (p. 7). Hence, caste-based discrimination against the Dalits is a serious crime.

5.2. The Gap between Promise and Delivery

Even though the constitutional and legal provisions (2.1) sound more equity-driven, we can read/hear/watch a series of local instances where discrimination based on caste and untouchability recurs. For example, a recent incident, which is notoriously known to the Nepalese public through many media is the case where a Dalit boy who, along with his four friends, was stoned to death when he went to the house of his non-girl Dalit (high caste) girlfriend (Mulmi, 2020). The other recent incident which includes the discrimination based on caste and untouchability is the case of a girl who was denied renting a room at a house of a non-Dalit landlady in the capital city Kathmandu after the girl revealed her identity as a Dalit

girl (Subedi, 2020). These two recent cases, even though there are many other cases, demonstrate how terrible and inhuman consequences of the caste and untouchability system have brought to society in the context of Nepal. The incidents not only smash social harmony but also unlawfully create social segregation.

5.3. An Urgent Need for Alternative Pedagogy

Now, since caste discrimination experienced by the Dalits in Nepal is terrible, it is high time to act for justice. Similarly, it is also necessary to materialize the anti-discriminatory constitutional or legal provisions. It is where, the role of education comes to be crucial, thereby calling teachers to act for justice through their classroom. The irony, however, is that the Dalits, in Nepal, experience exclusion even in the educational institutions the schools are more likely to reproduce rather than challenge the structural inequalities and caste-based discrimination (Poudel, 2007). Therefore, researchers have argued that the potential to influence future research and teaching in the Nepalese context should necessarily be oriented toward justice for Dalits (Khanal and Charles, 2022). Taking these educational and social settings into consideration, it is time to re-examine and recommend some pedagogical perspectives in order to promote justice against discrimination experienced by the Dalits in Nepal.

5.4. Caste Discrimination versus Compulsory English Textbooks

My study explores that the Compulsory English textbooks in grades 11 and 12 are deceptively neutral regarding caste discrimination experienced by the Dalits. The Compulsory English textbooks for both grades (11 and 12) have two Sections: Language Development and Literature. In both textbooks, the former section contains 20 units and the latter has 4 units.

5.4.1. How often Do the Textbooks Raise the Issue of Caste?

The English text in grade eleven is indifferent to caste discrimination. In the 332-paged English book-11, the word ‘caste’ is mentioned five times, and only at one point it sounds loosely critical: “Do you think there is racial/*caste-related* discrimination in our country? Discuss with your friend; write a five-minute speech” (p. 84). The question, even though it picks up the topic of caste discrimination, is biased because starts with ‘Do you think’. It presupposes that there may or may not exist caste discrimination in Nepal. However, we have already witnessed the cases of the Dalit boy ‘stoned to death’ and the Dalit girl ‘denied renting a room’. If there were such inhumane instances of caste discrimination, is it ethically right question to ask if there exists caste discrimination in Nepal? Therefore, I find the textbooks deceptively neutral.

Moreover, like in grade 11, the English textbook in grade 12 is also deceptively neutral. In the 300-paged text of grade 12, the word ‘caste’ is mentioned only once to teach the language of argument: “Is the reservation of quota for a particular sex or *caste* a good thing?” (p. 103). Again, like in the textbook of grade 11, this question deviates from the burning issue of caste discrimination faced by the Dalits in Nepal. The issue of ‘reservation quota’ based on sex and caste can be debated from various aspects. It is not a serious problem; it is only a matter of debate and discussion. The problem that the Dalits have been experiencing is caste discrimination and marginalization in Nepalese society. Therefore, the textbook of grade 12 is also deceptively neutral in vocalizing the traumatic experiences of the Dalits communities.

Hence, it proves that the textbooks are silent regarding the traumatic experience of the Dalits who have been undergoing the experience of caste discrimination on different occasions in Nepal. Therefore, now is the time to explore some possibilities of the application of critical and multiliteracies pedagogy in Compulsory English classrooms of grades 11 and 12.

5.5. Critical and Multiliteracies Pedagogy in Compulsory English Classes

There are a number of spaces in language sections where we can apply critical and multiliteracies pedagogy in grades eleven and twelve. The primary curricular goal and objective of language development in grades 11 and 12 are that the students will be able to use language in various contexts. Likewise, the objective of the literature section is to make the students familiar with different literary genres. In these both sections, a teacher can collect different materials in order to foster the language ability and literary taste of the students. Here, a teacher can apply both critical pedagogy and multiliteracy.

5.5.1. Critical and Multiliteracies Pedagogy in Language Classrooms

In the language development section, in both grades (11 and 12), there are some units that definitely give space for introducing such critical and multiliteracies pedagogy. For example, there are the units like 'Critical Thinking', 'Human Rights', 'Power and Politics' in the English Textbook for grade eleven. Similarly, in Grade 12, there are the units like 'Media and Society', 'Democracy and Human Rights', 'Power and Politics'. In all these units, the teacher can delve into the issues of caste discrimination and make students discuss on them by advancing their language learning skills. This is multiliteracies pedagogy advocated by Cope and Calentzis (2015) that not only develops the language skills of the students but also imparts what Freire (2014) calls a critical consciousness, a consciousness that goes against caste discrimination against the Dalits in the context of Nepal.

The teacher can implement critical and multiliteracies pedagogies in various ways. For example, a teacher can pick up the language materials in the social context of caste discrimination while making students practice the four fundamental skills of learning language: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Time and again, in the context of Nepal, the cases of caste discrimination have been broadcasted in the English language

through different national and international media such as Nepal Television, Radio Nepal, and a number of frequency modulation (FM) stations. A teacher can definitely bring them into class. Moreover, A teacher can make students listen/watch news broadcasts from the news channel British Broadcasting Center (BBC) which is more common in Nepal. In terms of fostering reading abilities, the teacher can collect newspaper articles that critique caste-based discrimination. The student can make arguments against caste discrimination and deliver their speech in class. Sometimes, a teacher can make them produce some language content for podcasts, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok engaging them in critical conversations against caste-based discrimination. In terms of writing, a teacher can make them write arguments/essays/speeches/letters to the editors against caste-based discrimination. Thus, the teacher can foster not only language abilities but also critical awareness. When such critical consciousness is imparted, it promotes justice against caste discrimination experienced by Dalits in Nepal.

5.5.2. Critical and Multiliteracies Pedagogy in Literature Classrooms

There are a number of possibilities where the teacher can apply critical and multiliteracies pedagogy while teaching the literature portion of Compulsory English in grades eleven and twelve. While introducing the conventions of literary genres (poems, drama, essay, fiction), a teacher can discuss the Nepalese literary texts which argue against caste-discriminations. There are many literary texts in Nepal that have been written from the perspectives of the Dalits. The teacher can also use those texts as references.

Similarly, the teacher can promote justice against caste discrimination experienced by the Dalits through the literature section. Some easiest ways to implement critical and multiliteracies pedagogy is thematizing, characterizing, and interpreting the texts in in Nepalese context. I do not mean that the literary text should be detached from their historical

contexts of production. What I mean is the understanding and interpretation of those texts by means of assimilations or identification. One of the strategies can be to make the students compare and contrast the themes and characters of the literary works with reference to some Nepalese communities where caste-based discrimination recurs. While doing so, the teacher can use some examples of audio-visual materials, protest movements, graphics, and art (of Dalits) connecting with the historical contexts, themes, and characters discussed in class.

There are some texts in grade eleven where the teacher can interpret them in relation to the phenomenon of caste discrimination. For example, the story “The Oval Portrait” by Edgar Allan Poe deals with the theme of art versus life. The husband makes a painting of his wife but the pain of the wife, who stays like a statue for her husband, has been seriously disregarded, and as a result, she dies: “This is indeed Life itself!’ turned suddenly to regard his beloved: She was dead!” (p. 203). Hence, it shows how indifferent humans can be toward fellow humans. In order to make the students understand it better, a teacher can interpret this story by drawing upon the similar experience of the Dalits in Nepal. In Nepal, especially in the localities where they are treated as ‘untouchable’, the Dalits are involved in manual works: they erect walls of houses and temples, design dresses, and do iron works.

Nevertheless, on some occasions in some local communities, no sooner the work gets completed, they are not allowed to be a part of it. Sometimes they have been forbidden to enter the homes and temples which they built. In means that art has been worshipped, but human lives have been othered and discriminated.

Similarly, in grade 11, the teacher can also infuse some Dalit issues while interpreting some poems. For example, the poem “A Red, Red Rose” by Robert Burns presents the theme of unconditional love. In the poem, love of a lover for his beloved has been beautifully presented; the physical distance does not matter before his love: “And I will come again, my

love/Tho' it were ten thousand mile!" (p. 246). While discussing this theme of love, the teacher can discuss the possible social hindrances that make love between a boy and a girl impossible in the context of Nepal. Such discussion automatically triggers the caste-based discrimination faced by the Dalits in Nepal. In the context of Nepal, the love or marriage between the upper-caste non-Dalits and lower-caste Dalits has been seriously discouraged in the family/community. It is a form of social stigma. Here, the teacher can present some YouTube videos, TikTok videos, and news reports that speak about the stigma of inter-caste marriage. Then, the teacher can encourage students to speak against caste discrimination experienced by Dalits in their communities.

Moreover, there are also many literacy pieces in the Compulsory English textbook prescribed for grade twelve. For example, the story "My Old Home" by Lu Xun narrates the pathetic story of two childhood friends. Their childhood friendship has been destroyed by the economic disparity in their later ages. According to the narrator, his childhood friend takes him as the 'master' and does not want to go near when the narrator goes back to his village after many years: "addressed me in a loud clear voice: "Master!" (p. 214). While interpreting this story, the teacher can relate it to the context of Nepal. The class can discuss how the caste differences make people either 'superior' or 'inferior' by birth despite the fact that they are friends or classmates or neighbors. Even though the Dalits may be economically prosperous, they remain of 'lower' status because of their birth in the Dalit family. When the teacher brings such discussions in class, the students get an opportunity to be more critical of any caste discrimination experienced by Dalits.

Moreover, the teacher can promote justice against caste discrimination while teaching some poems. For example, in the poem "The Awakening Age" by Ben Okri, the teacher can discuss the negative outcome of ethnic, cultural, and political conflicts. The poem describes

the terrible consequences of the conflict between the North and South Nigeria. The conflict ended up in war, deaths and bloodshed. However, the poem makes a call for harmony and reconciliation: “There's more to a people than their poverty/There's their work, wisdom, and creativity” (p. 240). While teaching this poem, the teacher can discuss the possible socio-cultural conflicts in Nepal. While discussing, caste discrimination can become one of the potential causes of conflict, disputes, deaths, and protests. Therefore, in order to avoid such terrible future conflicts, the teacher can make the students more critical at caste system.

5.6. Answer to the Research Question

Now, it is time to think of my research question and answer it. The research question of my study was: *Why and in what ways can a teacher promote social justice against caste discrimination experienced by the Dalits through Compulsory English classrooms in grades 11 and 12 in Nepal?* An English teacher should promote social justice by implanting critical consciousness in the students through grade level (11) and (12) in Nepal because Nepal has been experiencing caste-based discriminations for centuries. Actually, despite constitutional promises and legal provisions against casteism. Dalits, who have been taken as the lowest caste, have undergone violence, untouchability, atrocities, and , trauma. Therefore, it is the pedagogical obligation of an English teacher to wage war against it by applying alternative pedagogy—the pedagogy for social justice. The discussion that I did suggests that an English teacher can promote social justice by applying critical (Freire, 2014) and multiliteracies (Cope & Calentzis, 2015) pedagogical activities in the Compulsory English classrooms of grades 11 and 12 in Nepal. Even though the textbooks sound neutral regarding the traumatic experiences of caste discrimination experienced by the Dalits, an English teacher can relate language and literature to the phenomenon of caste discrimination in various ways. While teaching language abilities a teacher can teach the English language by means of audio-

visuals, protest movements, news articles, graphics, speeches, and writings where the content is the voice against caste discrimination. While teaching literature, the teacher can interpret some texts by relating them to the Nepalese social structure of caste discrimination where the Dalits have been pushed to the furthest margin. This is how critical and multiliteracies pedagogy purposefully intersect for social justice moves against caste discrimination experienced by the Dalits in Nepal.

6. Conclusion, Significance, and Recommendation for Further Research

The study shows that the Compulsory English teacher should incorporate an alternative pedagogy for social justice against any form of social justice against caste discrimination experienced by the Dalits in Nepal. Even though constitutional and legal provisions promise justice and equality among all castes, there exist different forms of discrimination against the Dalits in Nepal. Therefore, critical pedagogy and pedagogy of multiliteracies is one of the alternative pedagogical approaches that impart critical consciousness in the students and make them speak and act against caste discrimination. An English teacher can implement those pedagogical imperatives in Compulsory English classrooms in grades eleven and twelve while teaching both language and literature sections. While teaching language, the teacher can collect materials from different sources like Television and Radio broadcasts, English Newspapers, TikTok Videos, and he/she can implement them in order to develop not only the language abilities but also a critical consciousness in the readers. Similarly, while teaching prescribed literary pieces, the teacher can make a thematic, interpretive, and characterizing connection between the texts and the Nepalese context of caste discrimination experienced by the Dalits. Again while, assimilating the literary texts in Nepalese context, the teacher can explore various audio-visual and literacy pieces that exteriorize the trauma and stigma of caste discriminations experienced by the Dalits in Nepal. Hence, the study

concludes that it is the pedagogical obligation to act for social justice and equity, and it is possible through Compulsory English classrooms of grades eleven and twelve in Nepal.

In this sense, the study has its broader significance in social justice pedagogy. That is, the study is an attempt to initiate social justice and transformation through pedagogy which connects classrooms with the outer world. My study not only unearths the gap between social exigency and pedagogical obligations in the context of Nepal but also aims at promoting social justice by implanting critical consciousness in the students through pedagogical activities. Therefore, it offers some new perspectives on designing curricula, reinventing pedagogy, writing textbooks, and training teachers in the future. It is also a pedagogical initiative to promote justice as provisioned by the constitutional and legal provisions in the context of Nepal.

This study has triggered some critical questions that future research can work with. The very first question that came to mind was how well-trained the English teachers in Nepal are to implement critical and multiliteracies pedagogy in Compulsory English classrooms of grades eleven and twelve. That is, what type of pedagogical training is required for them? The second question that came into my mind was: Among Dalit students who start going to school, what percentage of them attend grades eleven and twelve? What if they drop out of school before they reach grades eleven and twelve? These are the questions the future research can work with. In this sense, my study has not only given a version of a social justice pedagogy, but it has also paved the way for further research in the overall educational and pedagogical system of Nepal.

Discussion/Workshop Questions

1. What writing assignments should be developed in the mandatory English classrooms?
2. How can we teach writing as a method of 'caste-critiquing' in the mandatory English Classrooms?
3. How can we balance creative and critical writing?

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