

**Student Agency in EFL Context: Practices of Empowerment Through
Critical Pedagogy**

Devi Prasad Adhikari

**A Dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English
Education**

Submitted to

Graduate School of Education

Office of the Dean

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Abstract

Student Agency (SA) and Critical Pedagogy (CP) are key issues in shaping teaching and learning languages, as they emphasize student empowerment, critical thinking, and active participation. Despite the growing emphasis on student empowerment, there remains a critical need to implement effective strategies that promote learners' academic autonomy by fostering agentic practices and critical consciousness in Nepalese higher education context. Thus, the present study explores how the practices of critical pedagogy can empower student agency in Nepalese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms and how students' and teachers' lived experiences reflect such empowerment.

In the study, I employed phenomenological ethnography, a blended qualitative design to explore the experiences of purposively selected six students and two teachers through unstructured interviews and informal discussions. Additionally, I observed and noted 31 classes of other two randomly selected teachers to investigate the influence of applying critical pedagogy approaches as a framework on fostering student agency in EFL classrooms of tertiary level. Thematic analysis was guided by self-determination, activity, critical, and cognitive theories, aiming to illuminate how critical pedagogy empowers student agency in EFL classrooms. The analysis focuses on elucidating perspectives on the empowerment of learner agency in the EFL context through critical pedagogy practices.

The findings revealed that students with high agency actively took responsibility for their learning, demonstrating increased engagement, motivation, and critical thinking in language classrooms. When provided with autonomy to question, analyze, and reflect, these students not only improved their critical thinking skills but



also exhibited enhanced metacognitive development, characterized by greater self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-regulation.

Similarly, the major findings demonstrated that enhancement of student agency was possible through critical pedagogy applying the techniques such as open discussions, think-pair-share, student-led discussions, flipped classrooms, and project-based learning, etc. The findings shed light the interwoven connections between the enactment of agency and practices of critical pedagogy in language learning. The experiences of participants exhibited a lack of student-centered instructional practices, such as inquiry-based learning, and collaborative activities, along with insufficient motivation, which are essential for fostering critical thinking skills and student agency in learning language skills.

This study expands the understanding of fostering student agency in the EFL context through the effective use of the critical pedagogy framework, an approach that encourages and empowers students to challenge and transform these systems through dialogues, reflections, and actions. The findings have important implications for teachers to further utilize critical pedagogical practices to enhance student agency and critical thinking ability in classrooms and beyond. Further, the study underscores the necessity for a robust framework of critical pedagogy and implementation initiatives by the educators to ensure that the adoption of CP in the classroom fosters SA and the critical thinking ability of students.



शोधसार

विद्यार्थी स्व-सक्रियता (Student Agency– SA) र समालोचनात्मक शिक्षण पद्धति (Critical Pedagogy – CP) विश्वव्यापी शिक्षामा महत्वपूर्ण विषयहरू हुन् जसले शिक्षण र सिकाइलाई विद्यार्थी सशक्तीकरण, समालोचनात्मक सोच र सक्रिय सहभागिताको माध्यमबाट रूपान्तरण गर्ने प्रयास गर्दछन्। विद्यार्थी सशक्तीकरणको बढ्दो महत्वका बाबजुद नेपालका उच्च शिक्षामा विद्यार्थीको शैक्षिक आत्मनिर्भरता प्रवर्द्धन गर्न सक्रिय अभ्यास र समालोचनात्मक चेतनालाई प्रोत्साहन गर्ने प्रभावकारी रणनीतिहरू लागु गर्न अबै आवश्यक देखिन्छ। यस अध्ययनले नेपाली परिप्रेक्ष्यमा विदेशी भाषाको रूपमा अङ्ग्रेजी कक्षाहरूमा समालोचनात्मक शिक्षण पद्धतिका अभ्यासहरूले कसरी विद्यार्थी सक्रियतालाई सशक्त बनाउँछन् भन्ने कुरा र विद्यार्थी तथा शिक्षकहरूको अनुभवले त्यस सशक्तीकरणलाई कसरी झल्काउँछ भन्ने विषयमा केन्द्रित छ।

यस अध्ययनमा मैले गुणात्मक अनुसन्धान डिजाइनको रूपमा फेनोमेनोलोजिकल एथ्नोग्राफी विधि प्रयोग गरेको छु। उद्देश्यपूर्ण रूपमा छनोट गरिएका छ जना विद्यार्थीहरू र दुई जना शिक्षकहरूसँग असंरचित अन्तर्वार्ता र अनौपचारिक छलफलमार्फत अनुभव सङ्कलन गरिएको थियो। साथै, अन्य दुईजना शिक्षकका ३१ वटा कक्षाहरू अवलोकन र टिपोट गरिएको थियो, जसले समालोचनात्मक शिक्षण पद्धतिलाई रूपरेखा बनाएर विद्यार्थी सक्रियता प्रवर्द्धन गर्ने प्रभाव अन्वेषण गर्न सहयोग पुऱ्यायो। विश्लेषण आत्म-निर्णय सिद्धान्त, गतिविधि सिद्धान्त, समालोचनात्मक सिद्धान्त र संज्ञानात्मक सिद्धान्तहरूका आधारमा विषयवस्तु विश्लेषण गरिएको थियो। उक्त विश्लेषणले विदेशी भाषाको रूपमा अङ्ग्रेजी कक्षाहरूमा समालोचनात्मक शिक्षण पद्धतिमार्फत विद्यार्थी सक्रियता सशक्त हुने प्रक्रियालाई उजागर गर्दछ।



यस अध्ययनको निष्कर्षले के देखाउँछ, भने कक्षा सक्रियता भएका विद्यार्थीहरूले आफ्नो सिकाइको जिम्मेवारी सक्रियतापूर्वक लिन्छन् र भाषा कक्षामा बढी संलग्नता र समालोचनात्मक सोच प्रदर्शन गर्छन् । जब तिनीहरूलाई प्रश्न गर्न, विश्लेषण गर्न र आत्मचिन्तन गर्न स्वतन्त्रता दिइन्छ तब तिनीहरूको समालोचनात्मक सोचमा मात्र नभई आत्म-चेतना, आत्म-निगरानी र आत्म-नियमनजस्ता मेटाकग्नेटिभ विकासमा पनि वृद्धि देखिन्छ ।

मुख्य निष्कर्षहरू अनुसार खुला छलफल, थिङ्क-पेयर-सेयर, विद्यार्थी-नेतृत्वमा आधारित छलफल, फ्लिप कक्षा, परियोजना-आधारित सिकाइ जस्ता समालोचनात्मक शिक्षण पद्धतिहरूको प्रयोगले विद्यार्थी सक्रियता बढाएको छ । यस अध्ययनले भाषा सिकाइमा विद्यार्थी सक्रियता र समालोचनात्मक शिक्षण पद्धतिबीचको अन्तरसम्बन्ध स्पष्ट पार्दछ । सहभागीहरूको अनुभवले सो प्रक्रियामा खोजमूलक सिकाइ र सहकार्यात्मक गतिविधिहरूको अभाव साथै प्रेरणाको कमी रहेको देखाउँछ जुन भाषा शिक्षामा समालोचनात्मक सोच र विद्यार्थी सक्रियता प्रवर्द्धन गर्न अत्यावश्यक छन् ।

यस अध्ययनले नेपाली उच्च शिक्षाको परिप्रेक्षमा विदेशी भाषाको रूपमा अङ्ग्रेजी कक्षाहरूमा विद्यार्थी सक्रियता प्रवर्द्धन गर्न समालोचनात्मक शिक्षण पद्धति रूपरेखाको प्रभावकारी प्रयोगमार्फत नयाँ दृष्टिकोण प्रदान गर्दछ । यसले विद्यार्थीलाई संवाद, आत्मचिन्तन र कार्यमार्फत शैक्षिक तथा सामाजिक प्रणालीहरूलाई चुनौती दिन र रूपान्तरण गर्न प्रेरित गर्छ । अध्ययनका निष्कर्षहरूले शिक्षकहरूलाई कक्षाभित्र र बाहिर समालोचनात्मक शिक्षण पद्धति अभ्यासहरूको प्रयोगद्वारा विद्यार्थी सक्रियता र समालोचनात्मक सोचको विकास गर्न प्रोत्साहित गर्छ । यो अध्ययनले समालोचनात्मक

शिक्षण पद्धतिको बलियो रूपरेखा र कार्यान्वयन पहल आदि कार्यको तर्क प्रस्तुत गर्छ
जसले विद्यार्थी सक्रियता र समालोचनात्मक सोचलाई सुनिश्चित रूपमा प्रवर्द्धन गर्न
सघाउँछ ।

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Declaration

I hereby declare that, to the best of my knowledge this dissertation entitled 'Student Agency in EFL Context: Practices of Empowerment Through Critical Pedagogy' is my original work. This work has not previously been accepted and is not being submitted for candidature of any other research degree to any university.

I understand that my dissertation will be a part of the Tribhuvan University Library collection. My signature below gives consent for my dissertation to be available to any reader upon request for scholarly purposes.

Devi Prasad Adhikari

23 May, 2025 (2082/02/09)



This is to certify that Mr. Devi Prasad Adhikari has prepared and submitted his dissertation entitled "Student Agency in EFL Context: Practices of Empowerment Through Critical Pedagogy" for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English Education. I recommend the dissertation to the Research Committee of the Faculty of Education, Tribhuvan University, Kritipur, Nepal for acceptance.



Associate Prof. Gopal Prasad Pandey, PhD

Supervisor

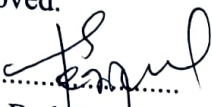
Head, Department of English Education, University Campus, Tribhuvan University,
Kathmandu, Nepal

23 May, 2025 (2082/02/09)




Approval Letter

This dissertation entitled 'Student Agency in EFL Context: Practices of Empowerment Through Critical Pedagogy' presented by Mr. Devi Prasad Adhikari for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in English Education has been approved.



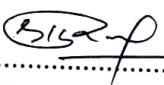
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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ATLAS.ti	:Archivfur Technik, Lebenswelt, Alltags Sprache.text interpretation (a Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software)
AT	:Activity Theory
B. A.	:Bachelor's of Arts
B. Ed.	:Bachelor's of Education
BICTE	:Bachelor's of Information Communication Technology Education
CCA	:Co-curricular Activities
CET	:Cognitive Evaluation Theory
CP	:Critical Pedagogy
ECA	:Extra Curricular Activities
EFL	:English as a Foreign Language
ELT	:English Language Teaching
ESL	:English as a Second Language
Int	:Interview
IPA	:Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
MBS	:Masters of Business Studies
M. Ed.	:Masters of Education
Obv.	:Observation
OT	:Observed Teacher
RCO	:Reflection of Classroom Observation
SA	:Student Agency
SCT	:Social Cognitive Theory
SDT	:Self Determination Theory
Sec	:Second

Chapter One

Introduction

Background of the Study

This chapter deals with the fundamental aspects of the study, beginning with the researcher's journey as a teacher and his perspectives on the core issues of the research: student agency and critical pedagogy. It also highlights the motivation behind the study, providing a contextual overview of the research phenomenon as the background of the study.

My Journey as a Teacher: An Overview

The memory of my first day in a class as a teacher often ridicules me. Three decades ago, it was a festive vacation in my school, Neelakantha Secondary School, where I was a grade eight student. During the vacation, I used to spend my time in my previous school, Karneshwor Lower Secondary School, where I had spent seven years of schooling. The school did not offer vacation between two great festivals Dashain and Tihar. It was the second day of the vacation. To my surprise! All of a sudden, my previous English teacher, Krishna Raj Sir offered me a chance to teach in grade seven. I still remember how he encouraged me to enter the class even though I was reluctant.

To talk about the Nepalese context, teaching is considered a holy profession, and teachers as incarnations of god. In the earlier era, there was a 'Gurukul' system in which teachers motivated their students to serve as role models. It was limited to the Guru's actions and behaviors. However, in the present context, several factors and approaches contribute to motivating students. To be specific, I try to encourage my students with different approaches. I highly encourage them to be critical and use their ability in classrooms and outside. However, I have not been able to find

remarkable changes in my students. This situation encouraged me to further examine how student agency is fostered by empowering learners through critical pedagogy in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms.

My Perception on Students, Classroom, Agency, and Pedagogy

I have spent the most significant portion of life with students. I am always conscious that a good relationship between teacher and students fosters a conducive environment in the classroom. The conducive environment creates chances for equality, freedom, inclusivity, motivation for learning, creativity, and involvement in activities. These help to boost the students' capacity to exert, influence, and create learning opportunities. Spending decades in classrooms has taught me that making the classroom interactive increases opportunities for meaningful exchange between the teacher and students. As such, my experiences tell me that teachers can change the dynamics of the classroom. The teachers can enhance students' ability to undertake classroom actions.

However, the context of the classroom where I engage is different. Most students depend on teachers. For students, the teachers are everything. When I was a student at lower levels, I took teachers as a polymath. I perceived them as multitalented, resourceful, and knowledgeable. But, slowly and gradually, the concept changed. During my school education, I found that teachers almost could not handle the class properly and treat students equally, inclusively, and fairly. Then, my conscience to see teachers and the classroom changed.

Being a student, I had experienced agency in a limited sense. I thought teachers did everything they liked. I had a few opportunities to manage classrooms and participate in other curricular and co-curricular activities, limiting my choices, interests, and abilities. I passively consumed what teachers poured in. It was similar to

Freire's understanding of traditional education, in which students are the passive recipients of knowledge (Freire, 2005a). Although the teachers encouraged me as a top student in the class, I was reluctant to expose my voice and capacity in the classroom. I did not interact with them openly, even as a first bencher. The class almost appeared to remain silent. The students rarely had arguments, discussions, and negotiations with teachers. I did not know my capacity and the things I could do. I excepted for listening to teachers' lecturers, parroting contents, and doing assignments. I found a similar situation to other students at that time.

Similarly, at the beginning of my teaching career, I used to take control of the class by hook and by crook. I wanted the class to be silent. I had no idea about motivating and fostering the criticality of the students. I was unable to help them express themselves openly, freely, and critically. Instead, punishment, reprimand, and toughness became parts of my classroom behaviors, contrary to what Corso et al. (2013) envision about the teachers that they are available, concerned, impartial, and respectful. The students called me a cruel and strict teacher. However, administrators and parents were happy to find me as a successful and good teacher to control my students and achieve the expected results.

Over time, when I studied 'Critical Pedagogy of the Oppressed' by Paulo Freire in a Master's level course, I started realizing the importance of such pedagogy in the classrooms. I thought only some motivational attempts could enhance the capacity and criticality of students. Though I tried to motivate students, I realized my classroom practices did not help to foster agency and criticality of the students. Therefore, I aimed to study teachers' and students' lived experiences through a phenomenological lens on student agency and an ethnographic approach to critical pedagogy. For this, as a researcher, I am concerned with the basic aspects of student

agency such as the principles of autonomy, relatedness, competency, and self-efficacy (Robertson et al., 2020). Knowledge of student agency helps to enhance academic advancement that occupies interactions with a curriculum, a pedagogy, and students' learning outcomes (Jaaskela et al., 2020). Overall, teachers' knowledge of student agency provides them with ideas to create a conducive environment for students to enhance criticality.

Motivation of the Study and EFL Context

Six years before, I came across a Facebook status posted by one of my B.Ed. First-year students. She expressed frustration, questioning why teachers seemed indifferent to listening the students like her. She pondered whether it was because of their non-affiliation with prestigious schools or their perceived lack of assertiveness in class. Her poetic expression claimed that teachers overlooked her and failed to engage with her because of her previous educational background. Her teachers failed to remember her name and did not give her the attention she felt she deserved. They often mentioned the names of one or two students in the class, even in their absence. Others were ignored. She believed that her voices were not being heard and her enthusiasm for learning was not considered. She questioned, "How can we develop our capacity from such teachers (*yesto shikshakbata hamro bikas hunchha vanne k aasha garnu?*)?" She meant that the overall classroom situation had limited her voice, agency, and criticality.

This post triggered my mind and ignited some questions. As a teacher, I found myself questioning whether I belonged to the group of teachers who might not be attuned to the voices of their students, particularly in the context described by the post. Thus, I aimed to understand the reasons behind students expressing such doubts about their teachers and why teachers like me might overlook their voices and the

aspects of agency. Hence, I wanted to study the aspects of student agency and critical pedagogy relating to each other in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms in Nepal, where English is taught as a foreign language. The medium of higher education in Nepal is English.

In the Nepali context, the curricula from the basic level to Bachelor's Degree have the provision to teach English as a compulsory subject. English is to be taught only through the medium of English, other academic subjects in higher education are also being taught in English (Ministry of Education, 2022; Sah, 2017). In the context where English is not taught as a second language (language after mother tongue) and not used for day-to-day purposes, is considered a foreign language. Thus, this study considers Nepalese classrooms as part of an EFL context.

Contextual Overview

The agency is considered from a wider perspective (Marin et al., 2020) and has become an important part of teaching-learning activities from the basic level to universities worldwide. It is viewed as the capability of individuals to make choices and act on these choices in a way that makes a difference in their lives. The capacity for a person to position themselves in a conversation as responsible for action is their agency (Martin, 2016). Considering this concept of agency, in the context of Nepal, university curricula portray students as individuals accountable for taking responsibility for their actions and interactions. Based on this notion, the present curriculum of M. Ed. in Tribhuvan University expects more engagement of students in the courses than their teachers' presentation in the classrooms (Tribhuvan University, 2025). It means the curriculum aims to make the students more responsible for the courses. Recently, the M. Ed. second semester major English course at Tribhuvan University has included critical pedagogy as a part of the

syllabus. The major goal of this aspect of the curriculum is to enhance students' ability to take charge of their agency development and enhancement of critical thinking ability (Tribhuvan University, 2025).

Particularly, agency refers to the quality of students' self-reflective and intentional actions and interactions with their context (Klemencic, 2015; Vaughn, 2020). Considering this aspect of the agency, the university-level curriculum in Nepal has set the provisions of assignments and thesis which are mandatory at the master's level (Tribhuvan University, 2025) and to some extent in the bachelor's degree. Students can grab the chances to reflect on their abilities by being engaged in their intended actions through such assignments and thesis works. They can develop through self-reflective and intentional action by interacting with the context in which they are embedded. They learn to recognize their potential when they actively participate in understanding and shaping the world around them as agents of personal and social transformation (Kelly & Pelech, 2020). In this regard, student agency is viewed as a transformative force that encompasses self-determination and, the successful attainment of individual objectives for further lives. Mac Donnell Mesler et al. (2021) view that students are likely to be agentic, that is they seek to employ some influence on their educational paths, their future lives, and their immediate and larger social surroundings. Kelly and Pelech (2020) further point out that student agencies must show a capacity for social transformation and restructuring.

Conversely, in the context of higher education in Nepal, student agency is often referenced but rarely elaborated in terms of how it is effectively encouraged and how it leads to transformative practices (Richert, 2020). For transformation of life, students' engagement in classroom activities with utilization of agency positions significant role. For this, teachers need to know more about how student agency is

being supported and fostered because student agency has been explicitly linked to learning through self-regulation. Agency cannot therefore be considered as separate from capacity and context but has to be considered as integrated (Adie et al., 2018) in teaching learning process. Moreover, teachers are considered facilitators to create an environment to exercise agency in the teaching-learning process. Teachers who bring a sense of place consciousness to their teaching can nurture the development of transformative agency for their students (Kelly & Pelech, 2020). Through the agency, the teacher can use the classroom as the context where students get a chance to flourish their capacity and seek opportunities for different activities.

On the other hand, curricula of Nepalese higher education focus on learner-centered approaches highlighting problem-solving and project-based teaching. However, there is no defined policy to implement agency and critical pedagogy in the curricula which is considered a concept that holistically depicts important constituents of intentional, purposeful, and meaningful learning (Jaaskela et al., 2021). The agency plays a significant role in demanding creativity, collaboration, and the transformation of work practices (Hokka et al., 2017). Agency manifested itself in actions and discourses to varying degrees—both knowledge-related and process-related—through reflection on the performance of tasks (Jaaskela et al., 2021) of students. Similarly, student agency presents opportunities for students to identify and utilize their unique areas of interest.

Moreover, the curriculum focused on student agency also seeks to develop the foundations of students' behaviour through collaboration with teachers. The interaction between a teacher and the class content involves the teacher's expertise in the subject area (Corso et al., 2013) in the use of pedagogy that supports student agency. The degree of student-teacher relationship supports students' engagements

which rest upon the student's sense that the teacher is available, concerned, impartial, and respectful (Corso et al., 2013). Moreover, student agency analytics provides a tool for students' self-reflection, self-regulation, and academic advising, and for teachers' pedagogical development in higher education (Jaaskela et al., 2021). Thus, agency is not the same as freedom. It helps simply to reduce oversight and lessens the restrictions on student activity (Lindgren & McDaniel, 2012) which promotes students' capacity for self-learning, choosing the right options, making decisions and, so on.

Student Agency and Critical Pedagogy: A Unified Perspective

In general, agency is one's capacity to act and cause change (Saarela et al., 2021). The development of agency is often defined as a critically important goal for all students (Vaughn, 2018), simply and broadly as "having and pursuing one's own goals" (Lanas, 2011, pp. 24-25). Researchers have agreed that agency is necessary for students to develop their ability to transform possibilities into opportunities.

Faithfully, standardizing one-size-fits-all programs in teaching does not cultivate student agency. Teachers can support the opportunities students have for the environment where they can enhance the ability to employ, influence, transform, and expand opportunities (Vaughn, 2020). Teachers can give their students the priority to build up their sense of agency by motivating them to make choices of their cultural interest, pedagogical requirements and the activities needed.

Additionally, emphasis on engaging students in opportunities to question, and express their opinions and ideas has been increasing in classrooms. Vaughn (2020) suggests that in classrooms where student agency flourishes, teachers perceive students as knowledge generators who have the potential to develop skills as problem-solvers and advanced thinkers. Such enriched learning classroom provides generative

contexts for students where they envision, create new possibilities, and solve problems (Vaughn, 2018). Thus, the agency is needed to extend the learning environment where students can flourish their intentionality which supports carrying out their willingness. Where students can move with their own intentionality and collective capacity, the agency can shape both process and outcomes of students learning (Lindgren & McDaniel, 2012; Martin, 2016). The agency provides students with the belief and confidence that their lives at school are worthwhile.

Along with this, the agency has an effect on students' academic achievement, learning consistency (Anderson et al., 2019), and critical thinking. Thus, the practice of student agency means enhancing their capacity to be critical and creative. To go with the critical aspect, it is necessary to conjoin with critical pedagogy. To make students critically aware, the radical ideas of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, against the existing banking model of pedagogy and learning led to the establishment of the critical pedagogy movement (Nols et al., 2019). Freire (2005a) positioned this banking approach within his 'theory of anti-dialogical action' which is against the strategies of feeding students by teachers. His main focus was on 'critical education' against the traditional banking model of education which only feeds students as passive recipients. He wanted to develop an approach to education that would prefer critical aspects of education through which the oppressive system in society can be transformed.

With the efforts of Freire along with others, critical pedagogy (CP) remains one of the major approaches to education that pursues to transform oppressive structures in society (Darder et al., 2017; Freire, 2005a; Jeyaraj & Harland, 2014) and classroom using democratic and activist approaches to teaching and learning (Darder et al., 2017; Freire, 2005a). Critical pedagogy is dedicated to the development and

evolution of a culture of schooling that helps to empower the voice of culturally marginalized and economically deprived students. CP tries to transform classroom structure and practices that perpetuate an undemocratic life. Likewise, it aims to enable emancipation through personal and social transformation (Braa & Callero, 2006) and the application of critical pedagogy has the potential to affect the change in classroom as well as society. Similarly, critical pedagogy in classroom discourse embodies the practice of engaging students in the social construction of knowledge. While practicing critical pedagogy in the classroom, teachers must question their practices in the process of constructing knowledge (Sarroub & Quadros, 2015) thinking classroom as a unique discursive space for practicing critical pedagogy (Darder et al., 2017). The discourses practiced in the classrooms are critical as they are inherently political in nature. Through the discourses, it is implicit that within the enactment of CP, power is negotiated by teachers and students.

Conversely, critical pedagogy basically concerns with the relationship between education and power in society which is committed to the improvement of equality and social inclusion in the classroom and society at large (Darder et al., 2017). CP is a language teaching and learning approach focuses on challenging and transforming power dynamics that are oppressive and contribute to people's marginalization (Kincheloe, 2008). Oppressors are those who have been excluded from the social, economic, and cultural aspects and unheard in different contexts (Freire, 2018). If the voices of students are unheard, they are oppressed by the teachers, and at large their agency is ignored. Listening to their voice, and creating justice and inclusion in the classroom is the dire responsibility of teachers. They need to create an atmosphere where their students feel free to express themselves and act accordingly. Students' actions and reactions in the classroom help improve their

critical thinking ability and agentive role in the enactment of inclusion and equality. These concerns of making students critically aware mean they also have chances of improving their agency. Thus, the practice of CP and SA go together in the classroom and beyond.

Additionally, with the help of teachers, classroom experiences become situations in which students are encouraged to act as active agents in their own education and to develop a critical consciousness (Freire, 2005a) that helps them assess the validity, fairness, and authority within their agentive practice and living situations. Critical pedagogy in this sense is a fundamental approach, that helps students raise their consciousness in understanding their overall capacity (Degener, 2001). All the roles played in the classroom presume student agency as something students can develop—individually and collectively— through self-reflective and intentional action and through interaction with the environment in which they are embedded (Klemencic, 2015). Students, exercising their agency can influence future lives and their immediate social surroundings through critical practices in classrooms as presumed by Freire. Correspondingly, the practice of building agency through critical pedagogy is useful in ESL classrooms. The agency can be built up by incorporating student voice in the classrooms which requires deliberate intention and commitment from the side of teachers. However, in the Nepalese context, as a long-time classroom practitioner, I can say that students do not get enough chances to project their voices, critique the authorities, and enhance their critiquing ability in their classroom. Thus, their enactment of agency remains unfulfilled due to a lack of practicing critical pedagogy. Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate CP within the study of student agency.

Statement of the Problem

As an EFL teacher with two decades of experience, I firmly believe that teachers have the potential to empower students to critically analyze societal inequalities by fostering agency through the application of critical pedagogy in classrooms. The curricula of Nepalese higher education also expect teachers to practice student-centric pedagogies. However, in the context of Nepal, there is a failed connection between teacher, students, and curriculum in the classroom and students are perceived as the passive recipients of knowledge (Freire, 2005a; Giroux, 2011; Giroux, 2020; Paudel, 2020) that has deemphasized the students' potentials. Thus, there is a need of commitment of critical pedagogy to redistribute power not only within the classroom, between teachers and students, but also in society at large (Cook & Artino Jr, 2016; Cook-Sather, 2006). In this context, Chalaune (2021) agrees that there is a need for effective implementation of critical ways to empowerment of learners that are rooted in critical pedagogy which fosters agentic practices such as autonomy, identity, resilience, motivation, metacognition, self-reliance, and growth mindset among learners. Regarding this, Kincheloe (2008) claims that teacher must empower their students by raising their awareness of the reproducing process of an inequitable status quo in schooling. Thus, teachers, in Giroux's terms, are 'transformative intellectuals' who have the knowledge and skills (Sadeghi, 2008) to empower students towards equitable learning opportunities, social justice, and active participation in their education.

In conventional classroom environments, particularly in Nepal, teaching often relies heavily on rote learning and teacher-centered approaches, leaving little room for students to actively engage in the learning process, think critically, or exercise autonomy. This lack of empowerment limits students' ability to connect classroom

learning to their personal and social realities, which are essential for fostering student agency, critical thinking ability, and meaningful learning experiences. Therefore, the exploration of critical pedagogy practices to empower student agency within higher education classrooms in the Nepalese EFL context is an important area of investigation.

Moreover, in the Nepalese higher education EFL context, the implementation of critical pedagogy—a framework that encourages open dialogue, critical thinking, self-reflection, and the questioning of authority—remains underutilized. This raises concerns about how such approaches can be effectively integrated to enhance student agency—characterized by autonomy, relatedness, self-efficacy, and competence—which is essential for preparing learners to critically navigate and challenge societal structures. However, there is a significant knowledge void due to the lack of research on how critical pedagogy fosters student agency, examined through phenomenological ethnography. This study aims to address these gaps in the Nepalese EFL context.

Based on the reviews conducted, it is evident that discussions on student agency in the Nepalese context are scarce, with limited focus on critical pedagogy. Notably, no studies have explored the intersection of student agency and critical pedagogy. Thus, the key issues lie in understanding how students experience empowerment through personal, relational, and participatory components of student agency and how the practice of critical pedagogy framework enhances their agency, within the context of EFL classrooms fostering critical thinking ability, meaningful learning, and engagement.

Objectives of the Study

The overarching purpose of the study was to explore how students experience being empowered to personal, relational, and participatory aspects of SA and to examine how the practices of critical pedagogy contribute to empowering student agency. Specifically, this research purposed the following objectives:

- i. To explore how students' lived experiences reflect empowerment through the personal, relational, and participatory aspects of student agency.
- ii. To analyze how the practices of critical pedagogy contribute to empowering and enhancing student agency.
- iii. To uncover how students utilize dimensions of student agency: dispositional, motivational, and positionality in the EFL context through critical pedagogy.

Research Questions

To operationalize the research objectives within a phenomenological ethnographic design, the researcher must, on one hand, align with phenomenology by carefully considering whose lived experiences are being explored, what those experiences are, and in which context they occur (Frechette et al., 2020). On the other hand, in ethnography, the researcher does not need to formulate research questions at the outset. Prolonged engagement with the participants and gathered data provide flexibility to reframe the questions. However, complying with the objectives of this phenomenological ethnography following the research questions were addressed:

1. How do students' lived experiences reflect empowerment through the personal, relational, and participatory components of student agency?

2. In what ways does critical pedagogy influence students' ability to apply the dimensions of student agency in their learning experiences?
3. What specific practices of critical pedagogy contribute to enhancing and empowering student agency?

Rationale of the Study

Student agency and critical pedagogy have gained global attention for their role in transforming language education. This study emerges from a growing need to critically examine the role of student agency within contemporary educational practices. In an era demanding transformative learning, understanding how agency unfolds in classroom settings through practices of critical pedagogy is both timely and essential. Despite global interest, the application of critical pedagogy to foster student agency remains underexplored in Nepal's higher education EFL context. By addressing this gap, the study aims to contribute to pedagogical practices that promote learner autonomy, critical thinking, and meaningful participation in the Nepalese tertiary EFL context. Further, the study seeks to address this gap by exploring the lived experiences of teachers and students and examining the influence of critical pedagogy on student agency.

The findings aim to inform educators and policymakers about contextually relevant strategies for empowering learners in Nepal's higher education landscape. This study will offer insights into how critical pedagogy practices can empower learners and improve engagement in EFL classrooms. The findings of the study are useful to the entire language teachers to be aware of the aspects of student agency and CP, and their relational impact on students' ability, critiquing capacity, and engagement. Moreover, teachers can use their efforts to aware students enhance their critiquing ability with agency. Taking the agency into account when designing

instructions and a course can support student learning and build their engagement (Lindgren & McDaniel, 2012) in critiquing tasks. When teachers are equipped with the knowledge and understanding of CP and student agency, they can transform their classrooms into discourse friendly where students find themselves free to expose their voices, ideas, thinking, and critical ability. Additionally, the findings become helpful to the teachers to be aware of the use of discourse-friendly pedagogy. Similarly, the findings give insight to teachers, curriculum developers, practitioners, and policymakers while planning curriculum, who should think deeply about how students achieve the expected goals of education (Chalaune, 2021) through fostering agency and critical thinking ability of the learners. This approach makes an effort to understand and interpret what the subject is thinking or the meaning they are making of the context (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017) in the language classroom through the practices of critical pedagogy framework. This ultimately leads to what Jaaskela et al. (2021) perceive about student achievement through their teachers' access to resources and they feel capable of organizing and implementing the courses of action necessary to acquire knowledge in language classrooms through appropriate pedagogical insights. Moreover, the study forwards the insights of using the pedagogical approaches in order to employ student-centric techniques such as think pair share, open discussion, critical reflection, collaborative activities, flipped classroom, etc. in EFL classrooms to boost learners' agency and critical thinking ability.

Delimitations

There were certain boundaries drawn up on this study. They are given below:

1. This study was limited to students, teachers, and EFL classrooms at the tertiary level in Nepal. The participants were limited to four EFL teachers teaching higher education and six students studying at the same level.

2. This study explored ‘lived experiences’ and agentic practices in EFL classrooms regarding situations, practices, and related approaches of CP. The research focuses mainly on exploring student agency through the lens of critical pedagogy.
3. The study focused on exploring the personal, relational, and participatory aspects of student agency, along with the use of open dialogue, think-pair-share (TPS), student-led discussions, flipped classrooms, task-based learning, and project-based learning approaches within the framework of critical pedagogy in EFL classrooms at the tertiary level in Nepal.
4. The research employs a purposeful, nonrepresentative sample to explore mainly the lived experiences of the practice of student agency and critical pedagogy in the limited territory of tertiary-level educational context. Therefore, the results of this study are not generalizable beyond the scope and context in which it was concluded. The implication of this study is that the findings can be used by teachers to enhance student agency in the context of both higher education and school education.
5. This study was confined to the theories including self-determination theory, agency theory, activity theory, critical theory, and social cognitive theory.

Operational Definitions of Key Terms

The specific key and conceptual terms used in this study are listed in the section with their definitions and descriptions concerning to this study.

Agency: The agency is associated with many different terms: motivation, intentionality, initiative, freedom and creativity. It is related to promoting the ability of individuals to perform better in any of the situations they face.

Critical Thinking: Thinking critically means developing ideas to look at or view things differently. It is the ability to judge and critique things from different perspectives.

Critical pedagogy: Critical pedagogy is both theory and practice that helps learners develop critical consciousness. It is concerned with transforming relations of power which might be oppressive and which leads to the oppression of humans. Specifically, critical pedagogy is a concept pioneered by Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire against the traditional banking model of education.

English as Foreign Language (EFL): In the context of this research, tertiary-level university classrooms where English is formally taught as a foreign language serve as the primary setting for exploring the practice of student agency. EFL class is the term used to describe the study of English by non-native speakers in countries where English is not the dominant language.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA): IPA is a contemporary qualitative research method grounded in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography. IPA serves as the basis for data interpretation under phenomenology design.

Interpretive research: It is the most common type of qualitative research. It assumes that reality is socially constructed and there are multiple realities, or interpretations of a single event.

Phenomenology: In this study, phenomenology was employed as an approach to provide in-depth descriptions and interpretations of the research participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon under investigation. This approach captures how the phenomenon has shaped their lives, particularly in fostering agency within and beyond the classrooms.

Phenomenological Ethnography: Phenomenological ethnography is a blended method of study that deals with different phenomena using various data collection tools such as interviews, observation, and field notes. Phenomenological ethnography makes it possible to discover how people construct their own cultural and political subjectivity within the context.

Student Agency: It refers to the quality of students' self-reflective and intentional actions and interactions with their environment. Student agency refers to a student's ability to generate ideas, set intentions, exert influence, and take action within the learning context.

Chapter Summary

The beginning of this chapter includes the researcher's journey of teaching and the researcher's perception of students, teachers, and classrooms that carve the background for the motivation of the researcher to carry out this research which have shaped the context and concept for the study. Then, I introduced critical pedagogy and student agency as the core issues of this research to establish an important connection to the research areas. This brief introduction to the issues has become an attempt to explicate the relationship between them and set the territory of the study.

Additionally, the statement of the problem explains and states the main thrust of the study. The purposes and the research questions signify the foundations of research inquiries. The significance of the study is an important component of this chapter to indicate the research value and usefulness. It is a crucial component of this chapter, as it demonstrates the research's value, relevance, and potential contributions to academia, policy-making, and practical applications. It explains how the study can benefit educators, researchers, and other stakeholders by offering new insights or solutions to existing problems. Besides, delimitations of the study clarify

its boundaries, specifying what is included and excluded to maintain focus and feasibility. The definitions of key terms are presented in the final part in order to draw attention to the focused areas of the study. The definitions provide conceptual clarity by establishing precise meanings for essential terms used throughout the research. This final section ensures that readers clearly understand the study's focus areas, preventing misinterpretation, and promoting consistency in analysis and discussion.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Foundation of the Study

This is a part of the study made as the review of literature on the issues of student agency and critical pedagogy with their relative theories. I have tried to draw a map of the literature in the areas. I used different search styles and databases to explore, read, and analyze the literature. The main aim of the review was to broaden the horizon of knowledge and understanding within areas of related theories and concepts. Another purpose was to trace the possible gaps in the fields. I have given different themes to make the review more clear and a way forward.

Foundations of Student Agency and Critical Pedagogy

The beginning of this section provides the related concept of the core issues and aspects of student agency and critical pedagogy. I succinctly dealt with the concepts and the underpinnings regarding the core areas of the study. These concepts built up the foundations for relevant theoretical underpinnings for the current study.

Student Agency in Higher Education

Jaaskela et al. (2021) define student agency in higher education as a student's experience of being empowered to engage through three components: personal, relational, and participatory resources. This engagement allows them to act in purposeful, intentional, and meaningful action and learning in study contexts. Among three components, Marin et al. (2020) explain personal resources as students' beliefs; relational as classroom environment; and participatory as context. Here, personal resources concern the learners' self-efficacy, competence, interest, and motivation for learning. The relational component refers to the classroom environment which includes peer supports and relations between teachers and students. Participatory resources come under the activities in the teaching-learning process. In addition,

teacher's instructions also play a crucial role taking up agency in appropriate self-regulating behaviours (Holmes et al., 2020). In the higher education context, students can also develop agency based on their own investigations to create the environment for gaining knowledge. Developing agency means the creation of a mechanism through which teachers can inculcate students in a meaningful process of analyzing, teaching, and learning. That helps to exert students' voices and perspectives in classroom practices (Cook-Sather, 2006, 2020) to build up transforming learning context through their experiences into a practical approach.

In the higher education context, there is a challenge for keeping balance to the choices and freedom of diverse students to plan their learning path with a succinct approach to teaching and learning (Klemencic, 2017). It is necessary to accept students' diverse identities in higher education classrooms. These differences among the students create possibilities for using agency analytics to support students in recognizing their resources for agentic learning. This is also helpful to the contribution of improving academic advising and teachers' pedagogical knowledge (Jaaskela et al., 2021). Anderson et al. (2019) consider that incorporating various dimensions and adopting a person-oriented profile analysis approach in higher education can help identify the factors influencing students' sense of agency in learning contexts, ultimately contributing to the development of student agency. Nurturing agency in higher education has a dire consequence in relation to academic achievement.

Contrary to the need and exigency of student agency in higher education, Jaaskela et al. (2021) point out that agency in educational practices of higher education has received very little attention. In the context of Nepal, there is a lack of adequate discourses on the issues of student agency in higher education. Presently,

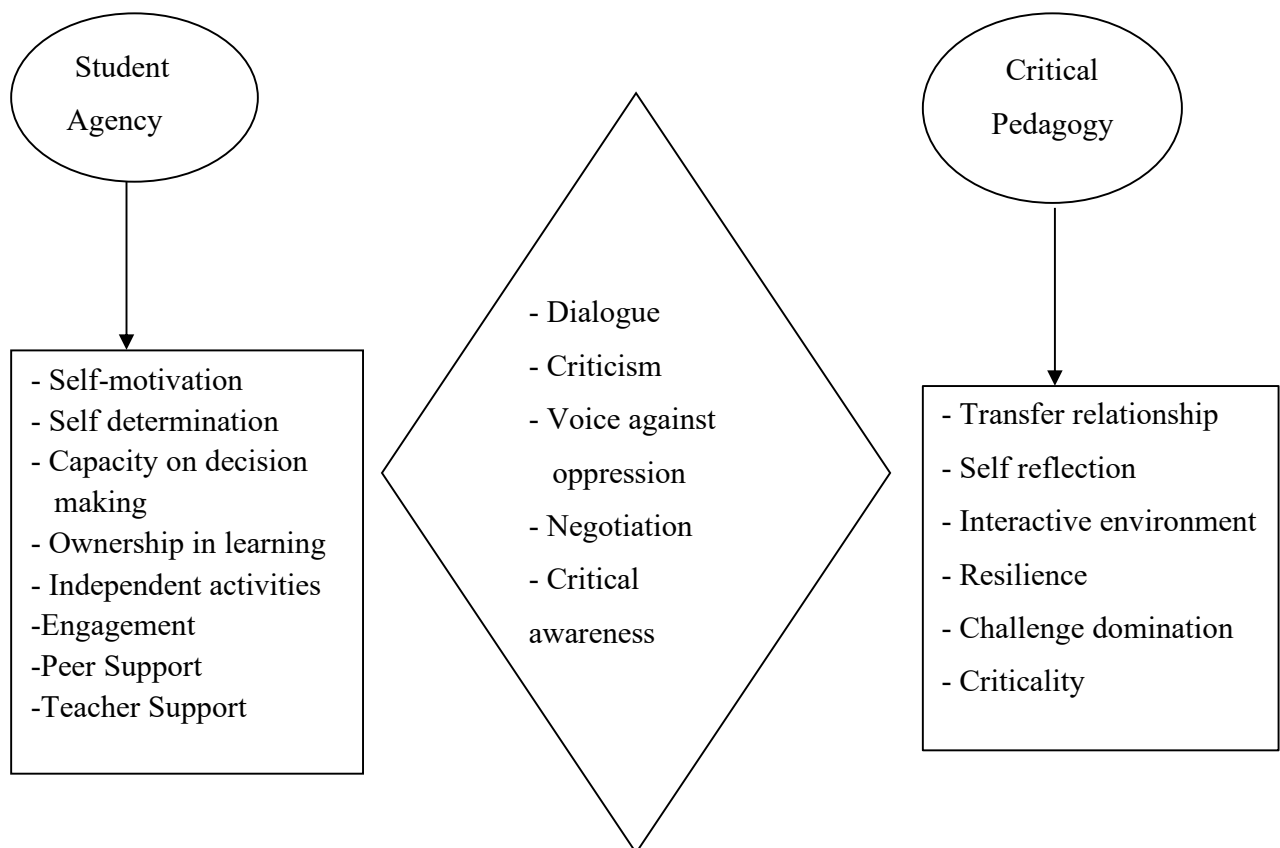
university curricula lack the provision of agency issues directly to be included in the classroom and beyond. Although the curricula provide instructions to the teachers to adopt student centric pedagogies (Tribhuvan University, 2025), there has not been a space for the term 'student agency'.

Bridging Student Agency with Critical Pedagogy

Student agency refers to the quality of students' self-reflective and independent activities in the classroom environment. It promotes the quality of interaction and reflection of students. On the other hand, critical pedagogy seeks to un-oppress the oppressed through developing critical thinking. Both critical pedagogy and student agency provoke students' freedom in the sense of raising their voices and enhancing their critical thinking ability. Critical pedagogy stands against the traditional model of oppressive education that creates a situation of oppression in society and acts as a means of oppression (Chalaune, 2021). Both, CP and student agency favour an interactive classroom environment that enhances students' critical ability to challenge domination. Regarding the role of teachers, they are expected to be passive facilitators and guides. They want teaching-learning activities to be dialogic, collaborative, and participatory. Developing appropriate agency by teachers has been an essential part of critical pedagogy (Costandius & Bitzer, 2015). Agency can be manifested through the use of deep, surface, or strategic approaches to learning (Basharina, 2009). Selective pedagogical practices are linked with increased student agency and deep learning (Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016). Similarly, Jaaskela et al. (2021) see the agency as being dynamic, contextually situated, and relationally constructed in nature with pedagogy, where teachers and students collaborate to identify needs or make changes to the process of learning (Richert, 2020). The aspects of student agency, self-determination theory, and personalized learning environments

(Rackley, 2020) are components of critical pedagogy. Based on the theoretical discussions and perspectives, I can present the following figure to show the interrelationship between student agency and critical pedagogy:

Figure 1. Interrelationship Between Student Agency and Critical Pedagogy



Additionally, critical pedagogy looks to create conditions that enable students to develop personally meaningful understandings of the world and recognize their agency to create change and take action (Ross, 2016). To enhance students' critical thinking ability teachers can apply critical activities such as open discussions, self-reflection, think pair share, power mapping etc. in EFL classes. In other words, teachers help students toward a lifelong ability in critical thinking (Soodmand Afshar & Donyaie, 2019). Students who work hard and stay active tend to have greater focus, increased interest in education, stronger critical thinking skills, better concentration,

improved planning abilities, and greater perseverance through challenges compared to those who do not. Students being “active decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs” (Borg, 2003, p. 81) enhance lifelong critical thinking capacity fostering agency.

On the other hand, critical pedagogy can be seen both theoretically and practically as helping learners develop critical consciousness through agency. Agency refers to the capacity to act, mediated by sociocultural factors (Ahearn, 2001), which is concerned with transforming relations of power that might be oppressive and lead to the oppression of humans. It attempts to humanize and empower learners (Kincheloe, 2008). Student agency as a capacity for autonomous social action or the ability to operate independently of determining constraints of social structure helps to understand and act critically. Student agency emphasizes the role of students in the classroom as independent learners (Kelly & Pelech, 2020). Similarly, Freire (2005b), assumes that critical education aims to prepare teachers who are empowered to transform the unjust status quo; teachers who can play an active social role by creating the context for positive action and by drawing the attention of their students to the less privileged. Therefore, critical pedagogy challenges and changes structural and cultural inequalities in classrooms. It respects differences and promotes equalities, incorporates a moral vision to un-oppress the oppressed, and questions one-self and one’s society. By doing so, the school eventually may become a place for promoting social equality and a justice in society increasingly marked by diversity (Raihani, 2020). Similarly, the teachers play the role of communicators with students and create their agency regarding society and culture to help them reflect critically on

various aspects (Paudel, 2020). Formation of agency to individual student with a free communicative environment enhances critical thinking capacity of the students.

Relevant Theories: Perspectives and Principles

In this section, I have included relevant theories, their concepts, and principles, that are essential to the study.

Agency Theory

Klemencic (2015) uses Bandura's sociological theory of human agency in conjunction with social cognition theory to introduce the idea of student agency as a process of students' self-directed reflective acts. Bandura (2001) places social cognitive theory in communal, proxy, and personal agency categories before Klemencic. According to Bandura (2001), an individual's endowments, belief systems, self-control, and dispersed structures and functions are all examples of their agency. When given an option, the person may feel empowered, in control, or autonomous. According to Moore (2022), the more options accessible, the more capable these people will be of identifying and choosing options that support the development of the agency. Furthermore, according to Bandura (1999), student voice influences agency by enabling students to express their thoughts more clearly and fostering the growth of their leadership concepts. It also leads to a greater role in society and enhanced learning. Therefore, agency is not limited to the individual characteristics of the institutional ecosystem and even the larger macrosystem but also encompasses the collaborative effort of multiple dimensions that comprise society at large (Klemencic, 2017).

Agency. The agency is conjoined with many different terms: motivation, intentionality, initiative, freedom, and creativity (Bryce, 2014). The agency is required in shaping human behaviour. Motivation, freedom, and creativity are major

proponents of changing behaviour. There is a continuous debate about agency-making to shape the behaviour of students in education. Language teaching cannot be an exception to the debate of agency. The agency influences the choices and opportunities available to learners because it is the capacity of individuals to act independently to make their own free choices (see Bryce, 2014). Student agency refers to the quality of self-reflective actions and interactions of the students with their environment (Klemencic, 2015). The collective or individual roles students take up as their agency can develop self-reflective and intentional action if they mitigate the environment in which they are embedded. Klemencic further clarifies that much of student action is self-searching for their identity, their purpose in life, and the meanings of their existence.

The agency can shape both the process and the outcomes of student learning. Process means the entire roles students play inside and outside classrooms in teaching-learning activities. On the contrary, the outcome is the achievement they carry in their personal and social life. Their interactions in society involve social elements of the classroom. Their classroom engagement is affected by their relationship with the teacher, society, and peers (Corso et al., 2013; Saarela et al., 2021). Family background, past experiences, and projection of the future as well as study environment shape how individual students exercise their agency (Klemencic, 2015). Exercising agencies individually and in collaboration helps to promote the voice of students inside and outside the classrooms. Students can exercise agency dimensions such as participation activity, opportunities to influence, peer support, and then trust for the teacher.

Student Voice. Another major dimension of student agency is student voice. Students want to be heard and they seek their involvement in learning design. This

demands teachers to set a clear purpose in collecting and responding to students' voices and their expressed learning experiences (Richert, 2020). Teachers in this regard become the passive agents. They create an environment and motivate students to put their voices collectively and individually. Students are involved and choose their instructional tasks and activities. Luo et al. (2019) consider that student voice allows the students to choose their task and activities where teachers passively participate. Student's voice allows the students and the teachers to decide their instructional tasks collaboratively. The teachers facilitate the learning process by considering their students' voices. They become responsible for guidance and feedback to the students. They are actively involved when demanded by the students. Thus, student voice is an important aspect of agency.

Behaviour. Moving to the theoretical aspects, it is clear that a theory of student agency develops the micro-foundations of student behaviour. In social-cognitive psychology, the agency is typically linked to individuals' self-processes and behaviour. "Drawing from social cognition theory and sociological theories of human agency, student agency is conceptualized as a process of students' self-reflective and intentional actions and interactions during studentship, which encompasses variable notions of agentic possibility and agentic orientation (Klemencic, 2015, p. 13). It is not reasonable to put the burden on teachers in the variable learning pursuits of each student in a large class. The agency is not the same as freedom; one cannot expect that students will naturally embark upon meaningful and achievable learning inquiries simply by reducing oversight and lessening the restrictions on student activity (Lindgren & McDaniel, 2012) and behaviours. The agency does not mean total freedom in behaving everything. It draws certain boundaries putting students free to learn and shape behaviours within the learning environment. The degree of freedom is

relative to the student-teacher relationship, which supports student engagement to rest upon the student's sense that the teacher is available, concerned, impartial, and responsible (Corso et al., 2013) to cultivate students' engaging behaviour. When the teachers become concerned the students enhance strength to freely project their activities. These activities help shape their behaviours.

Engagement. In addition, agency theory investigates relationships between two parties where one party (the teacher) engages the other (the student) to perform tasks on their behalf (Nikula & Kivisto, 2020). Principally, students' autonomy, competence, and relatedness are also fundamental to student engagement (Robertson et al., 2020). Engagement plays a significant role in activating and regulating students' presence with autonomy and competency. Student engagement has been directly linked to reduced dropout rates. Students who are more engaged in learning activities are more likely to attend school and college (Corso et al., 2013). The development of student agency in integrated academic, career, and technical education occurs through ongoing, meaningful experiences and relationships that are connected to influence students' sense of self in relation to the world. The development of student agency in integrated academic, career, and technical education occurs through ongoing, meaningful experiences and relationships that are interconnected, integrated, and influence students' sense of self in relation to the world (Athinelis, 2020). Clarke et al. (2015) further specify that student agency is the capacity of students to act purposively towards individual goals, change the established pattern of classroom interactions, and actively evaluate learning practice for the specific context. Changing the structure of a conventional classroom through interactions holds major aspect of student agency theory. For promoting performance, cognitive development, and learning experiences, empirical evidence usually supports

the positive effect of engagement and agency (Luo et al., 2019). Agency is, sometimes, constrained by the factors in the socio-cultural context, such as power relations, experiences, and evaluations of trust and equality among the participants. Engaging students can avoid or lessen these constraints in the course of developing agency. In this study, student engagement is seen as one of the aspects of agency activity.

Critical Theory

Critical pedagogy has its historical roots connected to critical theory. Habermas, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Gramsci were the pioneers of critical theory movements. Among them, Max Horkheimer, the director of the Frankfurt School in 1930, has been credited with coining the term 'critical theory'. Through his classic essay "Critical Theory and Tradition," Horkheimer makes the first attempt within the Frankfurt School to trace out an intellectual space that separates critical theory from other intellectual traditions (Wheeler-Bell, 2019). Critical theorists earlier than Frankfurt school viewed that oppressors prevented people from understanding their social and material conditions as oppressive by "false consciousness," and thus individuals treated their conditional social relations as static. Wheeler-Bell further argues that by exposing the forms of false consciousness through ideological critique, critical theorists thought they could liberate people from oppression. Tracing the intellectual history of critical pedagogy, Gottesman (2016) argues that critical pedagogy stems from critical theory, particularly from the Frankfurt School. Different narratives link these traditions variously; Gottesman retells the dominant and problematic narrative and acknowledges the connection between critical pedagogy and critical theory. However, he fails to explain the theoretical connection between critical pedagogy and critical theory (Wheeler-Bell, 2019). Gottesman sees the

problem with this narrative that only focuses on the social theory debates within critical education research; consequently, it misses the need to normatively ground critical education.

In previous decades, in the contemporary society where critical theory emerged, Freire started the concept against the ‘banking model of education’ he sought a theory to support his concept of education. Freire (2018, p. 38) states, “We lacked theory . . . Our education was not theoretical”. He put forward the concept of critical education. Thus, not only he is considered one of the founders of critical pedagogy, but he also played a crucial role in developing a highly successful literacy campaign (Giroux, 2010) that paved the way forward to critical pedagogy.

In the course of theorizing critical pedagogy, Freire realized that social hegemony, oppression, and inequality would continue if the oppressed did not get their voice (Uddin, 2019). Thus, Freire adheres to critical education for the oppressed people. Uddin further clarifies that Freire establishes a gradual cultural revolution to give the oppressed a voice and understanding one designed to liberate people from oppression, domination, and ignorance. Freire then introduced the theory of critical pedagogy in the education system.

In a similar vein, Kitts (2020, p. 84) states, “The theory behind critical pedagogy is not simply lacking but rather is a theory-informed by praxis, one that begins with the people—in their time and place—to problematize relations of power through critique, which is, paradoxically, theoretical”. Theoretical negation and critique of power structure becomes the character of critical pedagogy. This turns out to be the methodology of critical pedagogy. “Ontologically, critical pedagogy theorizes schools as a complex arena of sociocultural reproduction and resistance” (Kitts, 2020, p. 85). Freire takes educational institutions as a ground to embark on

resistance and negation of the oppressive stance. Specifically, critical pedagogy helps students become aware of the forces that have so far controlled their lives and especially shaped their consciousness. Likewise, connecting the theoretical ground of critical theory to critical pedagogy, Uddin (2019) states that the focus of critical theory is to understand the oppression of individuals, groups, and society that are similar assumptions of critical pedagogy. In this study, I utilized these theoretical ideas to focus on classroom practices in which teachers might oppress the voices of the students through their pedagogical practices.

Critical Theory to Critical Pedagogy. Moreover, there are ways to show the common nature of critical theory and critical pedagogy. Firstly, critical theory informs the critical pedagogue, moving teachers to thoughtfully lead a classroom environment that encourages students to examine the forces at work that drive their own particular interpretations. Critical theory as a process of thought significantly informs critical pedagogy (Kirylo, 2011). Secondly, critical theory relates to liberation through the questioning of political, economic, social, and psychological conventions that have already been taken for granted. Thirdly, critical theory aims to hear or raise the voice of the oppressed which is similar to critical pedagogy in the sense it seeks students to put their voice in classrooms. To add more, I can take the notion of McLaren and Kincheloe (2007) who believe that pedagogy is not merely a method or a priory technique to be imposed on students. It is a political and moral practice that provides skills, knowledge, and social relations that enable students to explore the possibilities of what it means to be a critical citizen.

Additionally, critical theory and critical pedagogy share common theoretical notions. In terms of ideology, oppression, and power relations both of them have a similar stance. The former limits its presence and practice in a society where as

critical pedagogy takes the classroom as a ground to practice and further extends to society. Both of them aim to aware citizens of the oppression and enable them to liberate themselves from oppressive situations in their lives. Critical theory directly goes to society where as critical pedagogy initiates through critical education. Critical pedagogy sees the classroom as its basic unit to practice through pedagogy. Initially, critical theory provides information to critical pedagogy. However, after the 1980s critical pedagogy disconnects itself from critical theory. To support this, Freire (2005c) claims that after 1981, however, critical pedagogy became increasingly disconnected from critical theory. During this time, critical theory underwent some changes where as critical pedagogy did not.

Nonetheless, CP is different from critical theory in that the former is the foremost an educational reaction to oppressive power relations and inequalities existing in educational institutions. It focuses on subjects related to opportunity, voice, and dominant discourses in education and searches for more equitable and liberating educational experiences (Abdullah et al., 2019). Similarly, critical pedagogy is a field of education dedicated to theorizing how education can be a progressive force for social change (Tarlau, 2014). Correspondingly, Kitts (2020) generalizes the theoretical aspect of critical pedagogy as a basic stance of questioning relationships of power in education to promote critical consciousness. Its practice and historical development are countless across time and space. Thus, by applying the concept of critical theory, this study explores how the lived agentic experiences of students in EFL classrooms shape their understanding of empowerment through critical pedagogy.

Self Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) provides a well-supported framework, which suggests conceptually different but complimentary behavioural regulations that people perceive to differing degrees of motivation. According to SDT, motivation is thought to follow a continuum of self-determination and has several distinct aspects, each of which represents a distinct type of behavioural regulation (Howard et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2006). The theory posits that motivation varies in magnitudes and orientations or types. STD uniquely focuses on the basic importance of autonomy and support (Ryan & Patrick, 2009). Humans innately desire to be autonomous. They want to be guided by their inner self to get maximum pleasure in life. Thus, they tend to pursue the activities that interest them through which they desire to achieve enjoyment. Similarly, they get higher achievements when they are guided by their intrinsic interest in the tasks. Believing this notion, Deci and Ryan developed SDT to enhance intrinsic motivation even in the conditions where humans face external pressures (Cook & Artino Jr, 2016). This obviously helps to focus on the autonomy and competence of the individuals who tend to rely on intrinsic motivation. On the basis of this assumption, SDT produces sub-theories such as cognitive motivation theory which is an integral part of developing student agency and critical thinking ability among students.

Cognitive Motivation Theory (CMT). As a branch of self-determination theory, CMT believes that intrinsic motivation flourishes when three basic psychosocial needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—are satisfied. Being autonomous involves the ability to make decisions, express feelings freely, refrain from judgment, and take responsibility for one's actions. While relatedness stresses feeling connected to and having a sense of belonging with others who align with one's

ambitions, competence refers to a sense of self-efficacy (Cook & Artino Jr, 2016).

This theory further proposes individual experiences as a distinct category of motivation to different degrees. Deci and Ryan (1985) provide a framework that is well-supported to capture the best motivation experiences. These experiences show varying levels of internalization and integration of values of desired behaviour.

Regarding this theoretical basis, the present study tried to capture the lived experiences of agentic practices of the students developed by the motivation of teachers and peers. Similarly, the study explored the participants' experiences of being autonomous in an EFL classroom to achieve self-competency and determinism through different motivational practices.

Extrinsic Motivation and Intrinsic Motivation. SDT identifies two types of motivation that guide individual behaviour. Extrinsic motivation is guided by rewards or consequences different from an activity. An individual is guided by an intrinsic motivation when they do something for pleasure and excitement whereas extrinsic motivation comes into play when individuals act something due to external forces (Ryan & Deci, 2000). On one hand, extrinsic motivation promotes positive learning and student well-being by enhancing confidence. On the other hand, intrinsic motivation promotes self-reflective capacities developing self-determination and competence. Through motivational exercises including both extrinsic and intrinsic, teachers can meet students' emotional and social needs to promote higher-order learning and self-reflection by sustaining the teacher-student relationship. This helps to foster acceptance and trust among teachers and students (Kumari, 2024). However, negative feedback or reprimand decreases perceived competence which undermines both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Therefore, it is accepted that at many costs motivation has a connection to autonomy. As Deci et al. (2017) point out, students driven by extrinsic motivation have less autonomy than those guided by intrinsic motivation. Extrinsically regulated students perceive their behaviour as controlled by others, often through contingent rewards and threats whereas intrinsically motivated students control themselves by their internal drives. Thus, intrinsic motivation and autonomy are interrelated. Autonomy is an internal motivation that reflects the integrated validation and association with actions. Thus, in this study both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are considered the aspects of agency development inside and outside classrooms.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

SCT is one of the theories of learning that provokes human learning through reciprocal interactions with their social milieu. The theory assumes that people learn by observing others rather than merely through the direct augmentation of behaviours (Cook & Artino Jr, 2016). This view stems from Bandura's propositions that human actions result from shared interactions within three factors: personal, behavioural, and environmental (Bandura, 1989). Bandura (2001) further clarifies that self-regulatory function is the core feature of SCT. He claims that peoples' behaviours are mostly regulated by self-evaluative reactions to their own actions. Self-reflecting process increases personal standards. After personal standards are established, differences between actual performance and the set standard trigger self-evaluation, which later shapes future behaviour. This causes self-generated influences on actions. Therefore, self-reflection plays a crucial role in enhancing individual learning.

By striving for self-reflection and regulation, an individual attains a larger sense of personal agency (Schunk, 2012) which is crucial in learning. In this process, the individual learner activates and sustains behaviours and cognitions that are

oriented toward achieving goals. Their motivations are often affected by rewards and punishments, but cognition depends on how individuals perceive their environment and self-regulate their feelings, thoughts, and actions (Cook & Artino Jr, 2016). This happens due to the human nature of being thoughtful actors responding involuntarily to such rewards and reprimands. In the process of agency-making, the individual seems non-reluctant to face the rewards and punishments that are not because of their outcome of expectation. Therefore, finally, SCT underscores an individual's self-regulation striving to attain a greater sense of personal agency as an important aspect of the learning process. In this study, participants' individual experiences relating to their agency practices are explored and interacted within their social milieu relating to social cognitive theory.

Humanistic Theory: Activity at Centre

Humanistic theory views people as active participants in their learning and development rather than passive receivers of knowledge and information, it focuses on the inherent worth, dignity, and potential of every individual (Kumari, 2024; Tamrat, 2020). Education through humanism aims to develop the full potential of individuals including their cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions (Kumari, 2024). Key to humanism is the focus on self-determination and personal agency as humanistic theories consider individuals having an innate drive towards self-actualization, the process of realizing their full capacities (Wang, 2023). Supportive of this phenomenon, Maslow believes that self-actualization fulfills those desires or abilities inherent in human nature. For him, this is the supreme hierarchy of needs of every individual that encompasses spontaneity, creativity, and autonomy (Geller, 1982). If the individual is continuously supported positively by peers, teachers, and social members, they tend to recover a higher level of need. Otherwise,

when individuals are continually frustrated with fear and anxiety due to peers, teachers, and family members, their needs tend to decline to a basic level. Therefore, friends, teachers and the community surrounding every individual have a potential impact on the agency building of individual students. Within this domain, this study explored the practices of agency and critical pedagogy within classroom settings aligning with the community of peers, groups, and teachers considering the activities at the centre.

Activities Theory (AT)

AT originates from the sociocultural tradition of Russian psychology. In the beginning (1920s), psychologist Lev Vygotsky and later Aleksei Leontev contributed to originate and promote this theory. The theory assumes that humans carry out activities as individuals or in collaboration with others. However, the structure of the activity can only be analyzed and comprehended within a sociocultural framework (Babapour et al., 2021). Several recent studies of expansive learning perceive their unit of analysis a collection of two or more activity systems as activity systems are importantly interconnected and interdependent. This interconnected activity system may build up a network of multi-activity collaboration (Engestrom, 2014). The collective activity system is driven by a goal that is deeply rooted in the community. The activity object embeds motives. The motives are frequently implicit. Without the motive, there is no activity; hence making them challenging to be elicited (Engestrom, 2000). At the beginning of the learning activities framework, a simple idea is generated and then transformed into a new form of practice. This practice of activities gives meaning to different actions.

Furthermore, the process of doing an activity transforms both the subject and the object. The subject is the doer of activity and the object refers to the shared motive

of the activity. Besides, human activity is attained with one or more physical and psychological tools (Babapour et al., 2021). For example, the classroom as a physical and the teacher's pedagogy as a psychological aspect can be the tools of activity (Cong-Lem, 2022). The consequence of our activity strikes back at us with meaning and this demands further needs and desires to be engaged in other activities. These new activities further transform the world demanding new opportunities. Finally, this will give meaning to the various actions (Babapour et al., 2021; Bakhurst, 2009). These actions lead to the subject's agency, his or her capacity to change the world, and their behaviours. Regarding classroom activities, AT envisions that the activities are affected by pedagogy, motivation, the mindset of the teacher, and the classroom environment. Finally, based on AT, it can be inferred that students' involvement in activities and building agency are interrelated to each other are the core aspects of the study.

Review of Empirical Literature

In this part, I have reviewed research outcomes from local and global studies that are pertinent to my study, categorizing them into different themes.

Exploring the Foundation of Student Agency and Critical Pedagogy

The concept of student agency has a close affinity to human agency and shares similar characteristics such as intentionality, forethought, and self-reactiveness (Bandura, 2001). Intentionality refers to deliberate and purposeful action taken to fulfill the purpose. Forethought means the action carefully did looking for the future and self-reactiveness is the state of showing self-response. These all features are the outcomes of human minds because they have the capacity to create, generate, and reflect. Learning has an unavoidable relation with the mind. Behaviourists believe that learning is persuaded to occur through instrumental conditioning. With this concept,

teachers used motivation in a crude manner of rewarding and punishing consequences (Bandura, 2001). This trend did not last long. With the concept of human agency that perceives the human mind as creative, proactive, self-reactive, and self-deterministic (Bandura, 1999), the paradigms of motivation and learning have been changed. The agency has placed itself as a gateway to persuade or motivate human mind and its creativity. Similarly, agency is also associated with a proactive approach to the environment (Betz & Hackett, 1987). Bandura (1999) envisions three different environments: imposed environment, selected environment, and constructed environment. They are required to increase the exposure of personal agency. Thus, learners need to keep association with the surroundings they face.

Therefore, the classroom, teachers, and society have a significant concern for the motivation of the learners. Motivation in a sense concerns subjectivity, individual, person, and self of the learners thus its concept is very close to the concept of student agency (Frank, 2006). Emotion is another aspect of discussing student agency in any context of societal influences (Lanas, 2011). Agency is used as a concept of freedom, autonomy, rationality, and moral authority (Davies, 1991). Within these concepts, one has the power to produce changes by own's actions. Changing action is what the agency primarily seeks.

Bandura claims that researches and theories have confined human agency to personal agency which is exercised personally. Contrary to this, he presents three modes of human agency: individual, proxy, and collective (Bandura, 2006). In individual agency, a person changes self with one's efforts. Proxy agency requires intermediaries. Whereas, in collective agency, efforts are made in relationships or groups. Here, all three modes of agency, as prescribed by Bandura, are parts of student agency.

Conversely, the concept of critical pedagogy originated from the seminal work of Paulo Freire that dates to the 1970s. His book ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ provided the foundation for CP. The book is now unquestionably similar to other classics that connect the levels of works by Plato, Kant, Rousseau, Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, etc. It also occupies a special place in the canon of critical thought (Giroux, 2020; Peters & Besley, 2015). Paulo Freire is undoubtedly the main figure in the foundation and development of critical pedagogy (Dogan, 2014; Giroux, 2020; Ross, 2016). Freire’s radical ideas about education, pedagogy, and learning led to the establishment of the critical pedagogy movement (Nols et al., 2019). His movement against the ‘banking education system’ provided a backdrop to critical practices in education. The system provoked the depositing model of teaching. Teachers deposit knowledge in mind of learners as we deposit money in a bank account. Concerning this, Freire (2005c, p. 85) puts, “In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider knowing nothing”. He disregarded this system blaming that it did not deliver practical knowledge and critical thinking to students. In this regard, Dogan (2014, p. 79) viewed:

Freire disregards the “banking” concept of education. In this concept, students are seen as an empty bank account to be filled, which makes students passive recipients of the learning environment. As a result, receivers’ thinking and actions are blocked, therefore; they become conformists, lose their power to question, and inhibit their creative power. Banking is basically the same as Rousseau’s conception of the child as an active learner.

Freire was against the system that made the learners passive recipients. So, he aimed to transform education system of the time. He proposed the concept that education should enable people to determine their inner and future potential to challenge the current oppressed and submissive position and to transform society. It is a central concept which necessitates an awakening of the critical consciousness through a process of reflection and action (Dogan, 2014). Similarly, he explained education as either a tool that helps to integrate people into the judgment of the present system and bring about compliance to it, or it becomes “the practice of freedom,” that is the means by which people deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Freire, 2005b, 2005c). Within the complex situation of his time, Freire was in search of a way that would help to transform the situation of oppressed into democratic people which he thought was possible through education. He aimed to change the condition of submissive people. He thought that it was possible to hear their voice through a transformative education system. To begin the transformation, he propounded the concept of “critical pedagogy” that has taken up the notion of active, engaged participation in its call for education that is for liberation and requires learners to move from positions of oppression to active participation (Mora, 2014). Moreover, Freire (2005b) believes that active participation of people in interactions is possible if they are cultivated through the education system. Therefore, he advocated critical interactions which were necessary in the classroom. People could transform their critiquing habits into real-life practice which would be helpful in changing their social status. So, he started the moment of transformative education. After his initiation, critical pedagogy continues to evolve as a part of education continually engaging in self-critique and pedagogical renovation (Ross, 2016). Since then, it has brought

changes in the concept of pedagogy as well as the education system throughout the world.

However, scholars do not confine their understanding of the evolution of critical pedagogy solely to Freirean ideology. Ross (2016) argues that despite popular perception, and the conceptualizations of critical pedagogy by some of its most well-known proponents, there is no single ideological perspective or a particular social movement that defines critical pedagogy. Another major critique is that Freire's work does not fully provide the accounts needed to help us understand how teachers are to move to critical reflection and dialogical action (McLaren, 1999). Similarly, another critique is that the discourse of critical pedagogy is based on rationalist assumptions which lead to several contradictions and the 'transformative failure' of critical pedagogy (Ellsworth, 1989). Nevertheless, nobody can deny that Freire was one of the pioneers of the concept, design, and practice of critical pedagogy for which he devoted his whole life and remained at the center of discussion about CP.

Critical Pedagogy within Student Agency in EFL Classrooms

After the emergence of critical pedagogy, practitioners added some new aspects in the field of English language teaching and learning. The goals and ambitions of language teaching extend beyond classroom by giving some new principles, looking at this, "English language program was changed based on the role of English language teachers, learners, and even policymakers" (Abdullah et al., 2019). Within the premier of critical pedagogy, language teaching becomes the core aspect of inter-culturalism, ethnic diversity, and other social issues. Critical pedagogy gives direction and issues for dialogue, criticism, and voice against oppression through critical education. Thus, teaching language through critical pedagogy helps enhance students' speaking and critical thinking skills, enabling them to speak out

against oppression. Freire's work on critical pedagogy offered "both a critique of the way of schooling, in its current form, reinforces systems of oppression, as well as a theory of how education can become a means to help people collectively fight back against the inequalities they face" (Tarlau, 2014, p. 370). Schools became an easy ground to aware people of inequality and oppression. Teachers who teach language in schools can play a crucial role in practicing critical pedagogy, fostering student agency, and raising awareness about their potential and societal oppression by enhancing their linguistic skills. In keeping view with Freire, language teaching is an approach that challenges the banking model of education.

To create a negotiating atmosphere is to challenge the banking model of education. Teaching language provides chances for criticism and negotiations in classrooms. Students gradually know that the world is not a fixed entity, they are not like containers or depositors to be filled by the teachers (Fabbian & Carney, 2018). Linking language issues to critical pedagogy suggests the ways in which language teachers recognize the matters that are at the heart of students' concerns. Regarding this, Ooiwa-Yoshizawa (2018) evaluates English as a second language, teachers find it meaningful to adapt the theory of critical pedagogy and student agency into their curriculum and syllabus as they deal with language minorities. It gives a way of thinking and negotiating in producing knowledge.

Further, Kareepadath (2018, p. 47) puts, "A critical pedagogue should start from the 'knowledge of the learner' and not to stick to it but move beyond to become free of the knowledge positions". If the teachers are conscious of the contextual knowledge of students and their relevant cultural content, that will nurture critical thinking in language classroom settings. Similarly, Fabbian and Carney (2018) opine that students will develop awareness and basic knowledge to critically analyze kinds

of justice in their day-to-day lives if students' contextual cultural contents are fostered. They further socialize the knowledge within institutions and communities they are involved in. While engaging in linguistic skills they are involve in various activities collaboratively similar to the social activities outside the classrooms.

Furthermore, student agency refers to the quality of students' self-reflective and intentional actions and interactions with their environment. The theory of student agency develops the micro-foundations of student behaviour. The three dimensions of student agency; dispositional, motivational, and positionality as mentioned by Vaughn and Martin have a deep connection to the practice of critical pedagogy (Martin, 2016; Vaughn, 2020). Vaughn (2020, p. 4) further elaborates:

A model of agency presented here, emphasizes that agency is associated with: a) dispositional dimensions of individuals who act and transform environments; b) motivational dimensions of individuals who regulate their actions, exist within contexts, and make choices and decisions; and c) positionality of individuals in that individuals negotiate and interact within complex social contexts.

Each dimension can be discussed in the language classrooms with examples to conceptualize a model of student agency practicing with critical pedagogy. Therefore, student agency and critical pedagogy are interconnected, as both focus on shaping students' behavior, motivation, and identity, preparing them to transform their social lives through the linguistic skills they develop in the classroom.

Conclusively, it can be inferred that the use of critical pedagogy, teachers' perspectives, and lived experiences of both teachers and students carry a significant contribution (Hess, 2017) to the use of student agency in EFL classrooms. Teachers who implement these recognize students' priorities in the classroom that would be

helpful to transform their practices and potential in their social lives. Thus, respecting students' choices, interests, abilities, and desires in the classroom aligns with critical pedagogy, which can contribute to fostering agentic practices beyond the classroom. In this sense, practicing critical pedagogy becomes the solid foundation for the enhancement of student agency in the EFL context.

Critical Pedagogy: Prospects and Perspectives

This section incorporates some prospects and perspectives of critical pedagogy, drawing on the relevant literature to provide a comprehensive discussion. It examines how critical pedagogy challenges traditional educational practices, emphasizing student empowerment, social justice and transformative learning.

Against Pedagogy of Oppressed. For Freire (2005a), a "banking" concept of education, enables learners to view the world as static. This banking model is a misguided system in which knowledge is "the gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider knowing nothing (Fabbian & Carney, 2018). Freire (2005a) considers that it affects the learners' understanding. They simply adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality bestowed on them.

Against the banking model of education or oppressed pedagogy, Freire proposed the concept of critical education. Similar to Freire, Aliakbari and Faraji (2011) believe that critical educators put concern on emancipatory knowledge that enables students to understand how power relations in society manipulate social relationships. It also helps oppressed students by identifying with them that the learners are not recipients of knowledge rather they become creators. Basically, critical pedagogy, assumes that education can never be purely disinterested rather it functions to preserve the status quo. Thus, while serving the power structures in

society, it works to establish the status quo by challenging, critiquing, resisting, or subverting those very power structures (Abdullah et al., 2019). In critical education, teachers have critically reflective roles to produce open and equal circumstances, they must engage in deep self-reflection on their positions. The teachers' roles obviously affect their authority in the classroom (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011) which helps to foster equal opportunities to engage in dialogue, activities, or critical interactions among the students and teachers.

Proposing the concept of critical education, Freire blamed that the existing system failed to deliver critical consciousness among citizens. It could not help to put the voice of the oppressed against various dominations. He became confident that his concept of critical education could change the dynamics of the classroom liberating the students from oppressive conditions. This helps to generate situations where students can enhance their ability to think and act critically. The role of the teacher does not only become the depositor of knowledge and students as passive recipients.

Pedagogy of Transformation. Critical pedagogy is an effective strategy to enhance critical thinking capability and agency of students. CP helps to generate positive behavioural changes in students' lives. This is a strategy that enhances students' consciousness, understanding, and judgment (Uddin, 2019). The ability for judgment is a transformative knowledge. Critical thinking practices pave the way toward the transformation of knowledge into practice through agency. Teachers and students both need to take part in interactive activities in classrooms. This is the practice of criticism of the oppressive conditions of students. Proponents of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2005b; Giroux, 2010, 2020) affirm that as a form of teaching, it has a strong agenda for change, and it aims at developing students who are active and engaged citizens.

Connecting the pedagogy to the classroom, McLaren (1999, p. 47) argues that “critical pedagogy is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structure of school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-state”. Similarly, Bell hooks takes engaged pedagogy as a process for students and teachers engaging in a shared risk-taking and responsibility to embrace all the individuals, that are led by many voices (Abbot, 2017). In the same way, Giroux (2011) advocates for the role of the teacher as a liberator and democrat within the classroom, school, and wider community. Then they can practice transformative pedagogy for critiquing traditional and authoritarian practices of education. The pedagogy gives students a voice in the classroom. They engage in a critical-thinking atmosphere inside classroom. Then, they can transform their voice from the classroom to other social activities. When they do not find it safe to present them critically in the process of co-creating knowledge in the classroom, it is highly unlikely that they will engage in critical negotiation (Jordan, 2012). For this, it is necessary to create an appropriate classroom atmosphere where students can freely express their voices.

When students are free to exercise critical dialogues in the classroom, they develop capacity to transform knowledge into society (Tarlau, 2014). It helps to facilitate cognitive liberation among marginalized people and makes them accept their unequal position in society. Accepting the position or the reality means a way of making transformative efforts for liberation thereafter. As Freire believes, the poor people including many middle classes begin to experience oppression after they are aware of emancipation. The link between experiencing oppression and awareness of emancipation is therefore established between thinking and acting critically, thereby

transforming the individual and ultimately the society (Costandius & Bitzer, 2015). Therefore, critical pedagogy of schooling goes beyond a 'reflective' approach to teaching (Smyth, 2011). When students engage in critique and develop analytical awareness, they become embedded in the social context of the classroom.

A Revolutionary Pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is considered a revolutionary one. It is revolutionary in nature as it advocates for the voices of the oppressed which was popular during the 1970s and 80s. Since its inception amid the turmoil of a military coup in Brazil, its pioneer, Freire, envisioned it in a revolutionary way. He assumed that the voice of the "oppressed" could only be heard through a revolutionary education system. Freire along with progressive thinkers during the 20th century, thought of a common concept about the purpose of the education system and its relation to society concerning critical pedagogy which explains a unity and divergence of thought among them (Kitts, 2020). It was Freire's radical revolutionary and transformative proposals through a process that give rise to the pedagogy. Freire (2005c) thinks that the pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument for their critical discovery that both they and their oppressors are indications of dehumanization. He further provokes that even revolution, which transforms a concrete situation of oppression by establishing the process of liberation, must confront this phenomenon. Many of the oppressed who directly or indirectly participate in revolution intend to make it their private revolution. The shadow of their former oppressor is still cast over them (Freire, 2005c). For him, the shadow of oppression can only be prevented through the revolution of pedagogy.

On the basis of the Freirean concept, Allman (2019) sketches out the key principles of revolutionary critical pedagogy: mutual respect, humility, openness, trust, and commitment to learning to "read the world" critically and to transform

conventional and dominant educational relations. Similarly, Martin (2007) adds that a revolutionary critical pedagogy can provide the basis for developing alternative conceptions of social identity and subjectivity based on a continuous cycle of reflection and action that is grounded in the suppressed knowledge, skills, and social competencies of the oppressed.

Critical pedagogy, therefore, challenges to change structural and cultural inequalities in school, respects differences, promotes equalities, and incorporates a moral vision to liberate the oppressed. It also raises questions about oneself and one's societies. By doing so, schools ultimately may become an important place for promoting social equality and justice in diverse society (Raihani, 2020). This encourages co-education between practitioners, making them both teachers and learners of specific knowledge that they bring to the dialogue. In addition, organisational culture of respect, care, and solidarity practiced within schools can pave the way for the foundation of a community in which joint ownership, involvement and responsibility regarding the initiative can flourish (Nols et al., 2019). Problem-posing dialogue can become one important component for enhancing critical analysis that starts from the knowledge and experiences of participants, stimulating critical reflection, and supporting participants to determine their own future through various forms of individual and collective action. Extending the idea, Freire (2005c) suggests that the only effective instrument is a humanizing pedagogy in which the revolutionary leadership establishes a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed.

Considering these, both teachers and students can continue their critical activity (Freire, 2005c) within and beyond classrooms. Such activities help to enhance dialogue between teachers and students in classrooms. "The radical components

include: problem-posing dialogue that starts from the knowledge and experiences of participants, stimulating critical reflection” (Kaya & Kaya, 2017, p. 182). The problem of stimulating critical reflection lies in teachers who are increasingly reduced to the status of technicians, removed from having any control over their classrooms or school governance structures. Thus, Freire wants to transform the role of teachers and students through revolutionary critical education, so that students get ample chances to have critical negotiation with their oppressors. Through the use of language, students develop their capacity to resist oppression. In this issue, McLaren (1999) puts a similar understanding that critical pedagogy helps students develop a language of resistance, this must be a collective language given the social nature of oppression.

Finally, ‘critical pedagogy’ developing from ‘critical education’ has a revolutionary nature in itself. It becomes a revolutionary step when students get a chance to put their voices freely, equally, and critically in classrooms. The practice of critical pedagogy promotes the ability of students to negotiate with oppressors.

Practical Pedagogy. Changes in pedagogy in the sense that the pedagogy is also a way to ‘think about’ education rather than a way to ‘do’ in education. It is only the way to draw attention to the fact that pragmatic pedagogy is not a sharply defined educational program that can easily be put into practice in all kinds of different settings. It is merely a way to highlight that pragmatic pedagogy is not a strictly defined educational program that can be easily implemented across all settings (Biesta, 1995). In addition, for Biesta, pragmatic pedagogy is a critical and constructive tool and not a formula for educational praxis. This does not only result in a new characterization of practical pedagogy because the communicative interpretation of pragmatic pedagogy can be understood as an alternative to a subject-centered understanding of education. While both theorists: critical (Hooks, 2014) and

pragmatic (Dewey, 1888) frame the educational situation as one bound up within discourse and communicative action, critical pedagogy should not be understood as simply related to communication, it is at least two meaningful ways a pedagogy of communicative action and theorization. In this regard, Jordan (2012) argues that in order to achieve the goals of critical pedagogy, teachers must engage in practical pedagogical situations and strengthen its theoretical goals through the practical application of more traditional and moderate educational theories. Similarly, Keith (2007) argues that critical pragmatism can be assumed as a pedagogy of ongoing intrapersonal communicative action. In a similar stance, he adds that critical pragmatism is a theorization of pedagogy that avoids static standpoints, like an open question in a discussion and an argumentative stance in a formal debate.

Conversely, the pragmatic use of critical pedagogy is not limited to the explanations of reproduction. The most significant defining feature of critical pedagogy is its emphasis on the emancipatory potential of education, however, the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy is built on a critique of the reproductive process (Braa & Callero, 2006). Similar to student agency, Peirce (2015) also regards that the goal of critical pedagogy is to enable emancipation through personal and social transformation. The practical stand of both pragmatism and critical pedagogy is equal in the sense of liberating the learner's oppressive position. Similarly, Jordan (2012) argues that pragmatic theorizations of pedagogy deal importantly with the emphases on workability, concerning the necessity to confront standardization in the classroom which lacks critical reflexivity.

Overall, the practice of CP in classrooms provides fundamental grounding for a pragmatic approach hearing the oppressive voice of students capitalizing on their agency in order to develop self-determining ability. Practicing CP and agency offers

important insights for teachers (Jordan, 2012), it generally provides a workable alternative for them to engage with students in an interactive way. Interaction is obligatory for practicing a theory of pedagogy that appropriately blends elements of both critical and pragmatic pedagogy while re-centering in teaching and learning.

Transformative Power of Pedagogy

Scholars along with Freire wanted to change the system of transforming knowledge by a teacher-centred approach to dialogue and problem posing– students-centred activities (Uddin, 2019). Similarly, Taylor and Robinson (2009) point out that the existing model of education does not entertain dialogue, but rather prefers hierarchy and one-way imposition by teacher. Thus, this system is contrasted with cooperation, trust, and interactions assumed by critical education. This model gives the notion of transformative power of dialogue which is central to empowering critical thinking among students.

On the other hand, it needs creative, cooperative, and dialogical practices to enhance critical thinking. This challenges dominant ways of thinking and acting practice in the classroom (Costandius & Bitzer, 2015). Critical educators need to shape curriculum and pedagogy to make students more creative and critical. Creativity gives identity to the learners. Regarding the identity of students in the classroom, Giroux (2011) believes that the classroom becomes the platform for the identity, values, and desires of students. Thus, critical pedagogy invested equally in both the practice of self-criticism and critical self-consciousness. They give the ideas to be self-critical and analytical skills regarding the values and knowledge they encounter in the classroom (Giroux, 2010). If the appropriate classroom atmosphere is created learners feel safe and engage in co-creation of knowledge. Therefore, teaching

against the existing model is necessary in order to transfer the learners' ability to be creative and critical breaking the 'feeding and memorizing' system of education.

Moreover, McLaren (1999, p. 441) argues, "Critical pedagogy is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structure of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-state". In the same way, it is important that those involved in student voice have to understand the pervasive effects and potentials of power relations between students and teachers. The teachers will start a longer and deeper dialogue being alert to power and participation in student voice (Taylor & Robinson, 2009). Teaching against a teacher-centric approach usually respects power relations giving students chances to engage in dialogue and communication. The role of the student and teacher is modified there. Regarding students' and teachers' modified roles in CP, Canagarajah (2005, p. 932) states, "Critical students and teachers are prepared to situate learning in the relevant social contexts, unravel the implications of power in pedagogical activity, and commit themselves to transform the means and ends of learning, in order to construct more egalitarian, equitable, and ethical educational and social environments". This is an overall critical process of critical pedagogy, in which, Giroux's three types of origin of learning namely the voice of the institution, the voice of the academic, and the voice of the student are parts of self-production of knowledge. To keep the process, teachers should examine the relationship between silence and classroom opportunities. Thus, is it more important to study silence in a classroom context (Bista, 2012).

Finally, it is important to emphasize that the pedagogical practices one chooses to adopt are just as important as the curricular contents (Fabbian & Carney,

2018) while teaching against the traditional model. Through this perspective, teaching is what teachers do and learning is what students do. Therefore, students' and teachers' engagements in different activities inside and outside the classroom provide the foundations of knowledge as well as practice to transform against different social dominations and oppression. This is possible through the practice that Freire proposed to go against traditional pedagogy.

Power Relations Between Students and Teachers

Teachers and learners have a reciprocal relationship. Pedagogy plays a pivotal role in establishing relations among them. From the perspective of the power, it is generally clear that teachers hold power to influence their learners. This idea aligns with the view of Garland (1986), which asserts that wherever a relationship exists, power functions through domination and oppression. In this sense, teachers can become oppressors, and students are oppressed. For Freire, the dimension of education depends upon the dialogue between teacher and learners; in a larger sense, historical time depends upon a corresponding transaction between oppressor and oppressed—not in terms of dialogue, but in terms of struggle (De Lissovoy, 2008). The students struggle to establish a dialogue with the teachers in their classrooms. Taylor and Robinson (2009) hope that students' voices will start a longer and deeper dialogue when the teacher pays particular attention to power and participation in which the plural and context-specific relations of power are considered in more detail. If teachers keep themselves aware of power, students will be involved in serious dialogues. That enhances the critical thinking capacity of the students. Through critical pedagogy, language teachers can transform relations of power with the students. CP has become an approach to language teaching and learning which, according to Kincheloe (2008), is concerned with transforming relations of power that

are oppressive and lead to the oppression of people (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). CP challenges any form of domination, oppression, and subordination with the goal of emancipating oppressed or marginalized people. It means the pedagogy is helpful to aware students of unequal power relation.

Conversely, critical pedagogy refers to a basic stance of questioning relationships of power in education with the aim of enhancing critical consciousness, therefore, its practice and historical evidence are countless across time and space (Kitts, 2020). The practice of critical pedagogy in education provides the notion of sharing power among students and teachers. The pedagogies having critical notion support the conception of power-sharing within the classrooms where students engage (Lynch & Ovens, 2021). Similarly, in the view of Giroux (2020), critical pedagogy becomes responsible for power relations, subject positions, and social practices in schools and higher education institutions. However, achieving this may be challenging, as the relationships between teachers and students—including how teachers perceive themselves and relate to their colleagues—can themselves become a significant form of domination. This is similar to what Smyth (2011) believes about the power relationship between teachers and students. He thinks that relationships of domination occur in schools, and the biggest challenge lies in developing in teachers the capacity to enter into "power relationships" with their students. The teachers take challenges of keeping a power relationship with the students. In the sense of the teacher-student relationship regarding 'power', critical pedagogy is deeply collaborative (Lewis, 2009). Co-operating with the teachers, the students may exercise relation of power to their teachers. This ultimately helps students to understand power relations in society. Keeping a power balance between teachers and

students in the classroom and beyond is equally important to boost agency of students.

Policy and Practice Regarding Student Agency and Critical Pedagogy

Pedagogies are part of the curriculum. Every curriculum includes pedagogy important to change learners' behaviour. In curriculum, pedagogies provide theoretical foundations for teaching methodologies. Curriculum transforms students' concepts and behaviour through pedagogies. Similar to the idea of Giroux and McLaren (1992), the curriculum is transformative and fosters students' acquisition of the necessary strategies and skills that help them become social critics to make decisions that affect their social, political, and economic realities. It is important to see how ultimately individual pedagogy impacts and fits in a much larger web of interrelated parts, including the language policy within and across classrooms (Allard, 2017). Therefore, it is important to see the position of language curriculum policy in the choice of critical pedagogy.

In addition, both curricula and pedagogy cannot be neutral devices; they should promote emancipatory knowledge and practices, however, such liberating actions should also enhance respect and produce tolerance for the views of others (Giroux & McLaren, 1992). Therefore, the link between thinking and acting critically is promoted, thereby transforming the individual and, ultimately, society. Similarly, in the view of Giroux (2010), the curriculum provides students the knowledge and skills to expand their abilities from questioning to the rooted assumptions that legitimate and disempower social practices structuring every aspect of society. Ultimately, the students take responsibility for intervening in the world where they inhabit. Therefore, the curriculum should be planned in a way that needs to discontinue any form of

social inequality and justice. Curricula have the potential to encourage students to expose risk, take necessary actions, and generate hopeful thoughts.

Conversely, language curriculum can also play a significant role in developing critical insights of the students. Language teaching provides exposure and opportunities to the students to enrich their capacity to interact. Interactional patterns as guided by the language curriculum inside and outside of the classroom, help to circulate local ideologies and EFL services, and students' and teachers' life circumstances (Allard, 2017). The curriculum addresses the ideologies and life circumstances of teachers and learners through pedagogies to be applied inside and outside classrooms. EFL educators who believe in critical pedagogy find it meaningful to integrate critical pedagogy into their curriculum and syllabi (Ooiwa-Yoshizawa, 2018) as it helps foster the capabilities of students to negotiate and question any form of inequality. Therefore, critical pedagogy is an essential aspect of the EFL curriculum.

In Nepal, the syllabus of a Master's degree in English education has included critical pedagogy (Tribhuvan University, 2025). Students of M. Ed. majoring in English learn about critical pedagogy. The course includes a little theoretical perspective on critical pedagogy. It is a radical initiative to use critical pedagogy as the anchoring philosophy of the curriculum (Kareepadath, 2018). Pedagogy is concerned with offering students new ways to think critically and act with authority as independent political agents in the classroom and in larger society (Giroux, 2010). However, it lacks practicality to enhance skills in the learners even in higher education. There is no direct inclusion of aspects of student agency in the curriculum of Nepal up to Maser's level. Though curricula assume the use of student-centric

pedagogy from the basic level to higher education, they lack the practical provisions for implementing agency practices in the Nepalese context of higher education.

Research Gap

From the review of the literature, it is clear that there have been many studies on the issue of critical pedagogy. Comparatively, there are few studies found in the field of student agency in the higher education context (Jaaskela et al., 2021; Jaaskela et al., 2020). These studies show that critical pedagogy and student agency have a significant role in language learning and teaching. They are still relevant in the field. While critical pedagogy and student agency have been widely studied as separate topics, their interrelationship and practical integration remain largely unexplored. The review shows that many studies have been made on the perceptions and practices of CP and student agency respectively. However, to my knowledge, no single research has been found dealing with the issues of relating CP with student agency in any aspect. The aspect of teachers' and students' lived experiences on student agency within critical pedagogy remains unexplored. I purposed to study at a higher level because at this level agency is empirically and explicitly less studied (Jaaskela et al., 2021; Jaaskela et al., 2020; Jaaskela et al., 2017). Therefore, this study identified methodological, theoretical, regional, knowledge, and population gaps, and primarily explored how students experience empowerment through the personal, relational, and participatory components and the dimensions of SA . It also explored how the practices of critical pedagogy are supportive of enhancing critical thinking ability and fostering agency of the learners.

Conceptual Framework

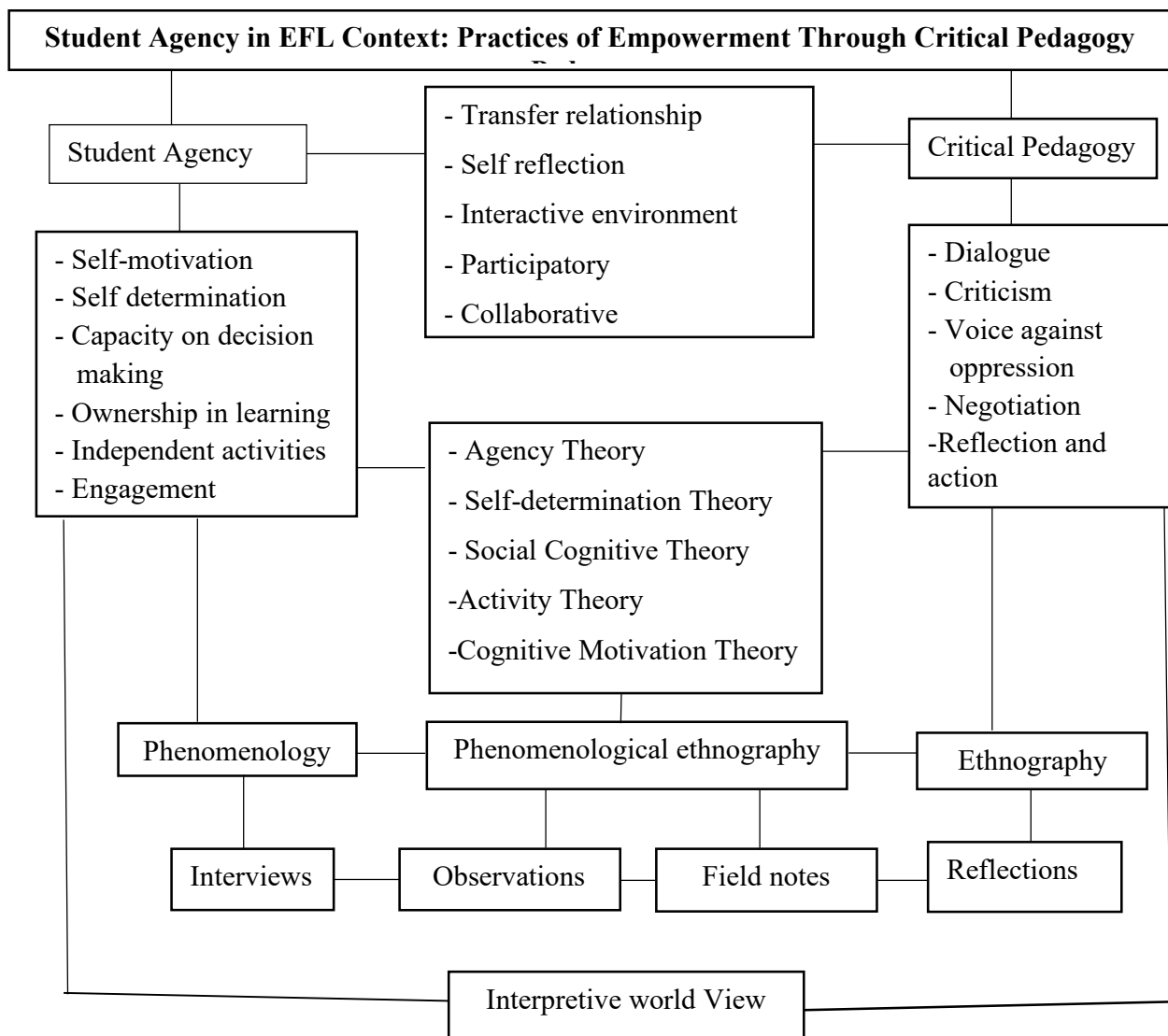
A conceptual framework is defined as a structure that the researcher believes can best explain the natural progression of the phenomenon to be studied (Van der

Waldt, 2020). The researcher chooses a process or a structure to find the way forward to fulfill the objectives. As a researcher, I have conceptualized a framework structured logically to provide a visual representation of how ideas in the study relate to one another (Adom et al., 2018). The agency is, for example, resourced or constrained by factors in the sociocultural context, such as power relations, experiences, and evaluations of trust and equality among the participants (Hokka et al., 2017). The potential of student agency analytics lies, for example, in the areas of students' self-regulation, academic advising, and teachers' pedagogical knowledge (Jaaskela et al., 2021). On the other hand, critical pedagogy is dedicated to the development and involvement of a culture of schooling that helps to empower the voice of culturally marginalized and economically deprived students. Likewise, CP tries to transform classroom structure and practices that perpetuate an undemocratic life. Similarly, CP aims to enable emancipation through personal and social transformation (Braa & Callero, 2006) and the application of critical pedagogy has the potential to affect the change in the classrooms and society.

The study mainly uncovered how students experience being empowered to engage through personal, relational, and participatory components of SA. It also explored how the practices of student agency are supportive of enhancing the critical thinking ability of the learners. It is necessary to use triangulation across multiple flawed and erroneous methods, observations, and researchers to get a better idea of what is happening (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016) in the classroom and outside. Therefore, this research used an inductive approach within an interpretive paradigm that envisions multiple realities in classroom practices and the participants' experiences. Finally, meaning was made by exploring how participants made sense of their personal and social world through 'lived experiences' based on the practice of critical

pedagogy framework in EFL classrooms.

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework



Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I tried to explore different aspects of critical pedagogy and its implications in education; especially in EFL classrooms. The literature review made so far presents an overview of critical pedagogy and student agency, exploring their theoretical foundations and classroom applications. Moreover, the chapter succinctly explores the theoretical and practical implications of student agency and critical

pedagogy. Besides, it presents the conceptual literature that provides foundations for understanding the scopes and dimensions of the core issues of the study. Similarly, this section examines the intersection of critical pedagogy and student agency to enhance and empower students' agency and creative thinking ability.

Moreover, this chapter plays a crucial role in addressing both the research gap and the conceptual framework, which are essential components in establishing the foundation of the study. The research gap section identifies the specific issue that remains underexplored or insufficiently addressed in existing literature. This gap is determined through an extensive review of relevant studies at both national and international levels, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of what has been previously studied and what still needs further investigation. By highlighting these gaps, the study justifies its necessity and contributions to the academic field.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

The methodological inquiry involved in this research presents the philosophical stance, methods, rationale for the research design, information collection tools and analysis procedures, participants, and procedures of selecting the participants for the study.

Philosophical Underpinnings of the Researcher's Stance: Interpretivist

Perspective

This study adopted interpretivism in which I embraced an open-ended research design process that allows emergent research questions, emergent modes of inquiry, and emergent reporting structure (Taylor et al., 2012). Similarly, Bodgan and Biklen (2011, p. 25) view that researcher in qualitative design strives to understand the meaning of events and interactions with ordinary people in particular situations. This study espoused interactions among or with participants. As a qualitative researcher, I studied things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) in the course of interactions.

As a researcher, my interest in the study went to the shared lived experiences of teachers and students within the classroom phenomena or practices such as student-led discussions, project-based learning, peer support, critical analysis, self-reflection, etc. I believe that multiple perspectives on these phenomena created a variety of beliefs that helped to describe the essence of critical pedagogy and student agency. So, I adopted an interpretive perspective to investigate the classroom phenomena regarding student agency in relation to critical pedagogy. As an interpretivist, with educational theory in mind, I considered what students knew and allowed them to put

their knowledge into practice (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Within the interpretivist paradigm, knowledge is considered to be constructed from the experience and is modified through different experiences. Additionally, Christie (2005) points out that interpretivism is a learning theory in which learning is both an active process and a personal representation of the world. Amineh and Asl (2015, p. 4) further state, "In interpretivism, learning is represented as a constructive process in which the learner is building an internal illustration of knowledge, a personal interpretation of experience. This representation is always open to modification". The social environment mediates the knowledge of the world from which humans gain the representational systems that ultimately turn into the medium or the mediator of thought (Sun & Zhang, 2021). The thought process has a connection to the view that perceives multiple realities. The reality can be external to individuals or produced by individual consciousness (Cohen et al., 2002) has something to do with ontology.

Ontology is a branch of philosophy that studies the nature of existence or reality of being, as well as the basic categories of things that exist (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). It addresses the assumptions underlying this research that guide what is considered meaningful or real. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) further claim that ontology enables the researcher to taste their underlying belief system and philosophical assumptions, about the nature of being, existence, and reality. Applying phenomenological ethnography research, reality is perceived as an individual construct dependent on different situations (Narayan, 2011). As a researcher, I believe that realities are multiple and there are various perspectives on truth. They are subjective. In this research, I presumed, participants exhibited multiple perspectives or experiences on the application and practices of student agency and critical pedagogy. My participants were diverse. I believe they comprised a multiplicity of

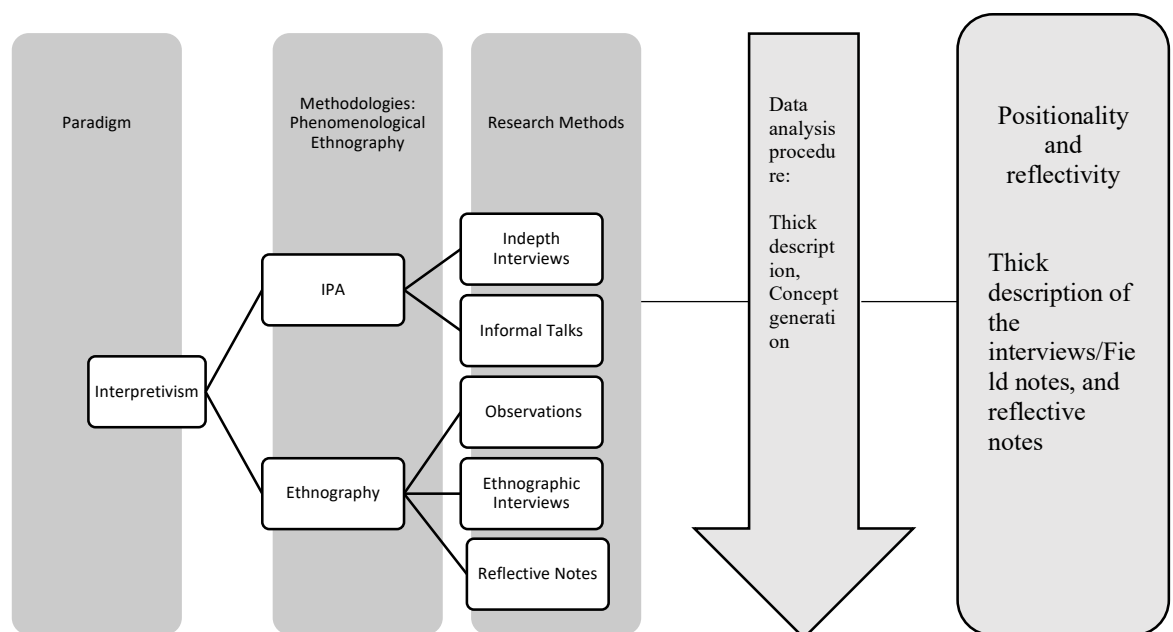
experiences, understandings, opinions, and contexts. Therefore, multiple realities existed across participants along with the researcher regarding the aspects of the core issues.

On the other hand, epistemology is concerned with ‘how we know what we know’ (Creswell, 2014; Narayan, 2011). It refers to the notion that the research work is supposed to contribute to knowledge itself. Regarding knowledge, (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017) claim that epistemology focuses on the nature of human knowledge and understanding. As a researcher, I have likely acquired knowledge and skills that enable me to extend, broaden, and deepen my understanding in my field of research. This is important in research, as it helps establish confidence in the data I collect. Furthermore, it has influenced my approach to discovering knowledge in a social context.

My epistemological stance was grounded in my ontological assumptions. I believed that my participants hold multiple perspectives on their own experiences, perceptions, and practices. I further believed that knowledge was best derived from the participants’ sense experiences and demonstrable facts. Thus, this knowledge was based on empirical evidence. I collected the information from multiple experiences, and the perspectives of the participants were interpreted and used to explain the phenomenon of student agency (Creswell, 2014). Practices were different as the participants represented multiple social contexts. The individuals who involved in it can only understand the social world (Cohen et al., 2007). In order to reach the knowledge, the participants needed to know that their understanding was subjective that was based on real-world phenomena. The reality is that the experiences, perceptions, practices, and interactions of student agency within critical pedagogy vary from participant to participant.

Axiology is another element of the research paradigm that refers to the ethical issues that need to be considered while planning research. It also refers to the involvement of the researcher's values and opinions in the process of knowledge generation (Narayan, 2011). It explores the question: What defines ethics or ethical behaviour? To answer this, it is essential to consider my respect for the human values of all individuals involved in my research project (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Consciously, I regarded the participants' value in establishing relations with them and becoming alert while involved in the information collection process. I believed their role had a crucial place in creating meaning, making sense, reaching knowledge, and understanding classroom phenomena. Participants' understanding and experiences in the issues added value to the research problem and became helpful to bring the solution. Finally, the values provided the standard for the evaluation of epistemological and ontological claims (Narayan, 2011) to my research findings.

Figure 3. Map of Research Methodology



Source: (Li, 2017), adapted and modified

Research Paradigm: Interpretivism

I employed an interpretive paradigm in this study. As the most common type of qualitative research, interpretive research assumes that reality is socially constructed. It believes that there is no single, observable reality, rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Additionally, Guba and Lincoln (1989) claim that the central endeavour of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. This shows that qualitative researchers are flexible, and creative to include interviews, observations, documents, websites, or archival material (Tracy, 2013) in the source of information. In addition, qualitative researchers show interest in how people interpret their experiences and what meaning they attribute to their experiences. They draw ideas from the philosophies of constructionism, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism to carry out qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In the current study, as the interpretivist researcher, I attempted to create meaning out of a variety of practices and performances available (Tracy, 2013) in classrooms and beyond. In this constructive learning approach, Pope et al. (2005) state that learner-centric instructional classroom methods are emphasized.

Therefore, I connected the central issues of this research (student agency and critical pedagogy) to learner-centric classroom methods such as student-led discussions, project-based learning, peer support, critical analysis, self-reflection, think pair share, flipped classroom, etc. The adoption of a constructive approach in this research allows researchers to rich descriptions, storytelling, and narrative—in other words, the features that make writing good (Leavy, 2017). Following the nature of qualitative research, I focused on process, understanding, and meaning; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Similarly, with the idea of Guba and Lincoln (1989), I added that the criterion of credibility to be used in the research is located within the interpretivist paradigm.

Rationale for Phenomenology

To explore the lived experiences in the practice of student agency and critical pedagogy, it is essential to articulate how students engage in exercising their agency to enhance their critical thinking skills. The methods of inquiry also included phenomenological reflection of current teachers' teaching at a higher level and the students of the same level on the issues. Philosophers Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz presented phenomenology early in the twentieth century as a major orientation to social science and a way to understand the context of the lived experiences of people and the meaning of their experiences (Alase, 2017; Emiliussen et al., 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Further, Moustakas (1994) explores the idea that in phenomenological science, there is always a connection between the external perception of natural objects and internal experiences, such as memories and judgments.

Internal perceptions and experiences mingle within the context of phenomenological study. Thus, "qualitative research is excellent for studying contexts the researcher is personally curious" (Tracy, 2013, p. 5). In this context, phenomenology allows for rich descriptions, storytelling, and narratives (Leavy, 2017) to discern meaning from a vast array of the information.

Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA)

In today's research world, the interpretive phenomenological approach is used in many qualitative researches to investigate and interpret the 'lived experiences' of people who have experienced common phenomenon. Thus, as a researcher, I preferred IPA as the adequate method that best describes the experiences I wanted to

elicit from my research. The importance and essence of IPA is its ability to explore, investigate, and interpret the ‘lived experiences’ of the research participants to understand what the experiences mean to participants (Lodico et al., 2010). Similarly, “interpretive phenomenological research looks closely at an individual’s interpretation of his or her experiences. The researcher using IPA attempt to understand the meaning of an experience from the perspective of the participant (Lodico et al., 2010). The most important aspect of IPA tradition is its ability to make sense of the ‘lived experiences’ of the research participants and to examine and interpret these experiences. Moreover, in a similar manner, Alase (2017) adds that interpretative phenomenological analysis seeks to interpret and amplify participants' lived experiences, requiring the researcher to deeply understand those experiences for meaningful interpretation.

Further, IPA gives in-depth descriptions and interpretations of the research participants’ lived experiences. Not limiting to this, Van Manen (2017) opines that phenomenology studies the primal, lived, reflective, pre-predicative meaning of experience. Thus, this study invigorated IPA design to ascertain the lived experiences of the participants in a descriptive manner.

Moreover, in this study, through IPA, I uncovered the assumptions lie to the research phenomenon, which means unleashing lived, primal meaning of ‘lived experiences’ on the practices of agency by the teachers and students. “Originating in the work of Husserl, the aim of IPA is to penetrate to the essential meaning of human experience, to focus on the phenomenon or ‘thing’ in order to generate understanding from within” (Keith, 2007, p. 19). Additionally, in IPA, as the phenomenologist, I focused more on the essence of the participants' experiences and relied heavily on unstructured interviews as the most unbiased way to understand what the experiences

meant to participants (Lodico et al., 2010). I conducted unstructured interviews to uncover the 'lived experiences' of the research participants. In IPA, this helped to articulate mainly how teachers and students experienced the practice of student agency and how they make meaning of their experiences (Peoples, 2020).

In this study, I moved into 'hermeneutic circle', between a part of the text and the whole of the text, to establish truth by discovering phenomena and interpreting them (Langdrige, 2007). I moved back and forth between the experiences of my participants and their own interpretations of what these experiences meant (Peoples, 2020). In this process, I adopted the ideas of Nigar (2020, p. 16), who believes, "Knowledge is created through the interpretations via one's experiences and constructed with the influence of the phenomena they participate within". Further, as an IPA researcher, I tried to recognize my participants' understanding of their own experiences, after they revealed their lived experiences, making this a double hermeneutic approach (Peoples, 2020). Finally, the analysis was conducted to understand experiences and how participants interpreted and made sense of those experiences.

Ethnography

Ethnography mainly deals with social discourses and cultural aspects of defined or non-defined groups of people from societies or communities (Reeves et al., 2013). Ethnography has been an important part of educational research because education is prominently a social construct. It covers the elements of descriptive and narrative interpretation widely (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). In this study, I deeply uncovered classroom issues as the phenomenon such as students' reluctance to engage and participate actively in developing their agency and criticality. As an ethnographer, I plunged deeply and directly into the classroom context of students taking it as a

major characteristic of ethnography (Draper, 2015). Draper (2015) further clarifies the importance of the emic and the etic perspectives of the researcher in ethnography. The emic or individual perspective interplays with etic or societal perspective. The former represents an individual's point of view whereas the latter presents a collective or wider social perspective. Thus, ethnography research design is a multiple-dimensional approach in which researchers come closer to understanding their personal interpretation of the research issues (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). As an ethnographer, I collected evidence or information based on prolonged observations which was helpful to build up thick information. More than one year of engagements in the classroom with noted or recorded observations randomly in intervals offered me the opportunity to build trust with participants which helped to be a mindless immersion (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). Moreover, my presence in the physical environment helped me to understand classroom dynamics and the practices over there. Thus, my social position as the ethnographer influenced the result of how the research was carried out and communicated (Barab et al., 2004). In ethnographic research, the emic perspective focuses on understanding phenomena from the viewpoint of the participants, reflecting their social meanings and experiences. It seeks to capture insider knowledge, ensuring that interpretations align with the participants' lived realities. Therefore, my subjective stance as an ethnographer remained throughout the study from the emic perspective.

Further, direct observations of the participants increased the chances of gathering experiences and perceptions that are not superficial (Reeves et al., 2013) nor seen in the public sphere. The observations in natural settings offered me resource-intensive data collection chances. This was possible because as the ethnographer, I got chances to use a range of methods for data collection (Draper,

2015). Due to this flexibility, I did not need to worry about specifying the research questions at the beginning. So, I opted for an inductive approach where thick description paved the way to the development of research questions after the study of the phenomenon (Reeves et al., 2013) that promoted methodological and data triangulation more research-based (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). Applying a single methodological approach may leave the research incomplete where more than one issues are dealt. In this study, for the completion of findings in line with the research questions, ethnography promoted a socially responsive design with the aim of change (Barab et al., 2004). In the study, the teachers participants made interventions over time to address the change in situation among student participants. More than twelve months of engagement with participants provided me chances to witness the interventions for changing their situations. This provided me the chance to infer research questions later on with related information. Before and after observation of the particular classes, I also collaborated with my teacher participants to implement the critical pedagogy framework (e.g. introducing debates on equality, student-led discussions, interactive or collaborative activities, problem-solving tasks, critical reasonings, self-reflections, task-based learning, power mapping, think pair share, flipped classroom, etc.) to see the changes in the development of student agency in the classrooms.

Phenomenological Ethnography: A Blended Method

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) explain that blended designs are more interpretative, creating a unified analysis where methods interweave instead of being treated as separate entities. Application of a single methodological approach such as ethnography may leave the research incomplete when two distinct issues are studied together (Maggs-Rapport, 2000) such as student agency and critical pedagogy. The

utilization of phenomenology and ethnography offers elements of wider interpretation for descriptive and narrative data. This also promoted a triangulation of both methodology and information in this study. On one hand, ethnography attempts to uncover the social and cultural underpinnings of classroom phenomena. On the other hand, phenomenology explores in depth the 'lived experiences' of the participants. Similarly, a long-time gathering of information in a natural setting through ethnography provided the researcher with an in-depth insight into classroom phenomena (Fehr-Rose, 2015; Reeves et al., 2013). Conversely, a combination of phenomenology and ethnography revealed the hidden voices of the participants when deriving meaning from the contexts (Li, 2017). Moreover, as the phenomenological ethnographer, I collected the evidence based on observations of existing interactions (Barab et al., 2004) that helped to build up a thick description and develop an intervention which became a crucial aspect of building trust and commitment between the researcher and participants. Li (2017) used phenomenological ethnography, the combined methodology in his PhD study, to discern the perspectives of Chinese college English teachers' transition from teaching English for general purposes to teaching English for academic purpose.

Similarly, phenomenological ethnography brings double perspectives in one analytical endeavour. It bridges the etic and emic perspectives of research participants. In phenomenology, the etic perspective refers to an outsider's or researcher's viewpoint when analyzing and interpreting participants' lived experiences. This perspective relies on objective, external interpretations rather than the emic perspective, which captures the participants' own subjective meanings and understandings. Furthermore, phenomenology typically prioritizes the emic perspective to explore individuals' lived experiences deeply. However, balancing

the emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspectives is crucial. An emic stance allowed me to capture authentic meanings and experiences whereas maintaining an etic awareness helped ensure analytical depth and objectivity. This dual role is often referred to as "reflexivity," where the researcher critically reflects on their position and potential biases while interpreting data. This role allowed me to gain participants' perspectives (emic views) while maintaining enough distance to critically analyze and interpret the observed phenomena.

The combination of both provides the basis for methodological and data triangulation. "Narrative analysis, together with biographical data can give the added dimension of realism, authenticity, personality, emotions, views, and values in a situation" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 959), which is suitable with the aim of this phenomenological ethnographic research design (Li, 2017). Considering this for ethnography, I did not specify research questions earlier. Contrary to this, participants' involvement in the research phenomena was assumed in phenomenology so as to uncover their lived experiences.

Therefore, I positioned myself to act as a useful research tool to generate knowledge in phenomenological ethnography (Li, 2017). Maggs-Rapport (2000, p. 223) highlights several advantages of phenomenological ethnography, emphasizing its empowering nature for both researchers and participants, as they play equally crucial roles in information collection and analysis. He further argues that this approach offers a holistic perspective, allowing for a deeper understanding of lived experiences within their social and cultural contexts. Additionally, it integrates both descriptive narrative elements and broader interpretative insights, utilizing data triangulation to enhance the reliability and depth of the findings. Therefore, this combination allowed me to explore how participants' individual beliefs, norms, and

practices shaped their experiences in terms of practicing critical pedagogy to the development of student agency.

Although these two approaches may have different affordances and goals, they share numerous similarities, highlighting the relevance of phenomenological ethnography to the current study. By incorporating elements of both approaches, phenomenological ethnography enables the exploration of how individuals construct their individual and political subjectivity within a given context (Gabay, 2016).

Ethnography depends on ethnographers' contextual observations and the researchers' second-hand interpretations to produce the entire data set (Creswell, 2014).

Succinctly, phenomenological ethnography offers methodological and data triangulation which provides a chance for rigorous description and analysis of the information. I remained transparent and obtained informed consent when engaging in interventions (Guba & Lincoln, 1988) collaborating with the teachers I observed. This provided me the opportunity to infer research questions, influence the situation, and obtain related information. Thus, phenomenological ethnography design is not only flexible but also has the strength of integrating methodological triangulation in this study.

Researcher as Tool: Etic or Emic

As a researcher, I took an emic approach that involves understanding practices of student agency and critical pedagogy from an insider's viewpoint (Draper, 2015), focusing on the beliefs, values, and practices of the issues as perceived by the participants. Using this method, I searched to grasp the participants' certain behaviours or practices as they were undertaken by the teachers and peers who participated in using agency through critical pedagogy inside and beyond classrooms. I acted as a facilitator for applying the critical pedagogy framework in the classrooms,

participating in discussion and counselling with the teacher participants before delivering their lessons. I observed the classroom dynamics from an insider's perspective in the natural settings, focusing on how students interpret and respond to opportunities for agency. Phenomenologically, I listened to students' narratives and reflected on their lived experiences, using interviews and informal conversations to uncover their perspectives on empowerment, autonomy, and decision-making.

In the study, balancing both perspectives was essential for the researcher, as it ensured a harmonious integration of emic and etic approaches. While an emic stance allowed me to capture authentic meanings and experiences, maintaining an etic awareness fostered analytical depth and objectivity. This dual 'reflective role' offered me the chance to critically examine my positions and potential biases while interpreting the information.

Intervention in Phenomenological Ethnography

The term 'intervention' simply has a significant position in experimental research. However, it has not been limited to certain design of the study. Intervention in ethnography, however, reveals constructive–yet often unintentional–disruptions of our epistemic practices, fostering experimentation, reflection, and new ways of reimagining ethnographic methods. This issue encourages readers to explore the behind-the-scenes aspects of ethnographic research, uncovering the lesser-known or hidden dimensions of ethnographic intervention (Otto et al., 2021). The researchers can collaborate with the participants either in an intended or unintended manner. After establishing those favorable conditions, researchers are able to refine the design to better align with that scenario and explore it as an intervention (Meyer & Cybis Pereira, 2013). Considering this, I collaborated and coordinated with the teachers as the participants of the study before observing their classes. I provided awareness and

training on the application of the critical pedagogy frameworks in their classroom practices. However, I did never interrupt or influence them while delivering lessons in the classes. They fully utilized their classes as they planned. I observed the classes in natural settings.

Although interventions in ethnography have the power to expand perspectives, reveal the unseen, and challenge rigid categories, they often remain unpredictable and spontaneous endeavors. Otto et al. (2021) envision that ethnographic interventions often evoke thoughts of cooperation and collaboration with minorities or activists. In this study, I had collaborations with the teachers who implemented critical pedagogy framework in their classrooms. With their willingness and cooperation, it was possible to see the changes in the status quo of the participants or the phenomena through their efforts. For the interventions to facilitate such a change I used reflections, discussions, and motivations (Argyris, 1985) with the teachers who took charge of the real setting of the classrooms so that they could easily implement their plan.

Participants and Context of the Study

Participants

The central principle of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is to give careful and detailed attention to each participant's account. This small sample enables a detailed analysis of each case of individual participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Keeping this in mind, I selected six students studying bachelor level from a campus and two EFL teachers teaching on the campuses for the purpose of interviews to explore their lived experiences. The selection criteria was purposive sampling as suggested by Peoples (Peoples, 2020) for phenomenological inquiry. In the purposive sampling, participants are chosen based on their accessibility,

convenience, or because they possess certain characteristics relevant to the study and have specific expertise on the topic being examined (Jones et al., 2014; Lodico et al., 2010). While approaching the participants, I found the common wide experiences of the teacher participants. The selection of these participants reflected and represented the homogeneity that exists among the participants' sample pool (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) despite variations in age, gender, and experience. The importance of phenomenological ethnography with homogeneous participants is to capture a better understanding of the overall perceptions of the participants' lived experiences and actions. The homogeneity of understanding the issues of student agency, critical pedagogy, and the practices among the participants helped me to generate meaning from their understandings and experiences. That led to a convincing conclusion for the study.

Thus, I employed certain criteria to select the participants (Creswell, 2014) so that they had a homogenous understanding and experiences in the issues of student agency and critical pedagogy (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Three criteria applied for the teachers were: a) have been teaching English as a foreign language at least for ten years; b) currently teaching English at the university/campus level; and c) have the concept and understanding of practices of student agency and critical pedagogy. Similarly, three criteria were applied to students: being regularly enrolled in a bachelor's program (major English/fourth year), actively participating in the classroom (as recommended by their teachers), and having the willingness to reflect on and articulate their experiences. There were 21 students (7 boys and 14 girls) enrolled in the major English group (in 2022) in B. Ed. fourth year. Out of them, I never saw five students' attendance in the class. Usually, twelve to sixteen students attended the classes. I found six students regular, punctual, and active in classes. I got

the same kind of information from other subject teachers so I selected these six students (two boys and four girls) as the participants to explore their lived experiences.

For ethnographic observations, I selected other two teachers teaching English at the Bachelor's level for more than a decade on the campus. I purposively and strategically selected teachers who showed a willingness to use the framework of critical pedagogy and have the concept of applying it. After approaching and explaining the purpose of the study, I obtained their consent by having them sign the consent form.

Table 1. Demography of the Participants (Students)

Student	Gender	Level	Age	Ethnicity	Attendance % in
Participants					class in a year
S1	Female	B. Ed.	24	Newar	98%
S2	Female	B. Ed.	22	Tamang	90%
S3	Female	B. Ed.	23	Chhetri	98%
S4	Male	B. Ed.	22	Tamang	85%
S5	Female	B. Ed.	23	Gurung	85%
S6	Male	B. Ed.	24	Newar	90%

Note. S1= Student 1, S2= Student 2, S3= Student 3, S4= Student 4, S5= Student 5, S6= Student 6.

Table 2. Demographic Details of the Participants (Teachers) for Interviews

Teacher	Gender	Qualification	Teaching	Age	Ethnicity
Participants			Experience		

T1	Male	M. Phil in English Literature	11 Years in Higher Education	43	Brahmin
T2	Male	M. Phil in English Education	17 Years in Higher Education	47	Brahmin

Note. T1= Teacher 1, T2= Teacher 2

Table 3. Demographic Details of Participant Teachers for Classroom Observations

Teacher Participants	Gender	Qualification	Teaching Experience	Age	Ethnicity
OT1	Female	Master's in Education	10 Years in Higher Education	38	Newar
OT2	Male	M. Phil in English Education	14 Years in Higher Education	43	Brahmin

Note. OT1= Observed Teacher 1, OT2= Observed Teacher 2

Table 3 provides demographic details of two the participant teachers whose classes were observed. The observed teacher 1 (OT1) is a 38-year-old female with a Master's in Education and 10 years of teaching experience, belonging to the Newar community. Observed teacher 2 (OT2) is a 43-year-old male with an M.Phil. in English Education, 14 years of experience, and is from the Brahmin community. These details highlight their qualifications, experience, and cultural backgrounds.

Table 4. Participants and Methods for Ethnographic Observations

Methods	Teacher1	Teacher 2
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Class observation	15 classes	16 classes
Interviews	with informal talks	with follow up discussions
Reflections		31 Reflections (following each observation)

Table 4 provides an overview of the research methods used to gather data from two teachers' classroom observations. It summarizes the key approaches used, including class observations, interviews, and reflections. I observed 31 classes of OT1 and OT2 with intervals to enhance the validity of the observations by capturing natural, routine classroom dynamics indicating a deeper immersion in the study environment. The observer recorded 31 reflections, with at least one reflection following each classroom observation. This suggests a consistent practice of documenting insights and personal interpretations of the observed sessions.

Research Context

There are twelve community campuses affiliated to Tribhuvan University in Dhading district, adjacent to the capital city, Kathmandu. For my study, I chose Nilakantha Multiple Campus from the district. According to the authority, the campus enrolled 986 students in the year 2022 in different six programs (B. Ed., BICTE, B.B.S., B.A., M. Ed., M.B.S.) ranging from Bachelor's degrees to Master's degrees. It has employed more than 30 faculties. I selected this campus as my research context because my 18 years of teaching experience there have provided me with deep familiarity with its academic environment, faculty, and student dynamics. This long-term engagement has allowed me to build strong professional relationships, making it

easier to establish trust and encourage participation among students and colleagues. Additionally, my sustained presence on the campus ensures convenient access to participants and necessary information, facilitating a smoother and more effective process for information collection. Given my understanding of the institutional culture, teaching practices, and student behavior, this campus served as an ideal setting for conducting in-depth research, ensuring both relevance and practicality in my study. Moreover, my engagement as a faculty at the campus during the study provided a convenient schedule and ample opportunities for prolonged ethnographic observations lasting for about twelve months.

The campus is situated in the central part of Nepal. The campus community includes students and faculties from various indigenous and ethnic backgrounds, fostering a multicultural environment. This diversity enriches academic and social interactions, promoting inclusivity and mutual respect. The campus features modest yet functional infrastructure, including classrooms, a library, and limited technological resources. There are also basic amenities supporting extracurricular activities and community engagements. Affiliated to Tribhuvan University, the campus offers Bachelor's degree and Master's degree programs across multiple disciplines, including education, humanities, and management. Despite resource constraints, it maintains a steady focus on academic quality and community-centric education, striving to address the region's educational needs.

Besides, the ELT environment at Nilkantha Multiple Campus is a blend of traditional lecture-based teaching and limited interactive methods, such as group discussions and role-plays. While dedicated faculty strive to enhance English proficiency, challenges like large class sizes, use of traditional pedagogy and minimal use of technology hinder student-centred learning. Resource constraints also limit

opportunities for innovation in ELT practices. Despite this, the campus remains committed to improving students' English language skills.

Information Collection

Qualitative research involves using various qualitative data collection methods to help the researcher explore and understand the perspectives, meanings, and experiences of individuals within specific social contexts (Lapan et al., 2012). The importance of phenomenology as a qualitative research approach is its ability to examine and interpret the 'lived experiences' of research participants. One of the unique features of qualitative research is the face-to-face nature of information gathering in natural settings (Lapan et al., 2012) through interviews. Additionally, "The phenomenologist focuses more on the essence of the human experiences and relies heavily on interviews as the most unbiased way to understand what the experiences mean to participants" (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 210). As an interpretive phenomenological ethnographer, I adopted unstructured interviews and informal talks as flexible information collection methods to investigate in detail how participants perceived and made sense of things that happened to them and what they did. It was because unstructured interviews allowed greater flexibility of coverage which tends to produce richer data (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). I carried out the interviews individually to explore the lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) of the participants. The individual unstructured interviews supported to access the first-hand experience of the respondents adding through unstructured conversations. I used individual follow-up interviews and informal discussions to fill the gap that exists in the information collected (Peoples, 2020).

Further, as basic tenets of the interview in phenomenological ethnography, I explored the experiences of participants, not their perceptions, feelings, and thoughts

(Peoples, 2020), it is because participants' lived experience is important in phenomenological analysis. The interviews usually were very lengthy, and some of them lasted for an hour. I took the first interviews with the participants but they were not sufficient to gather the required information. I took interviews again. To fill the gaps in the information collected I made informal discussions with each participant until I got the saturation.

Besides, for the ethnographic information and triangulation of the data, I had prolonged observations (Reeves et al., 2013) of two teachers' classes throughout an academic year (2022–2023). The classroom observation began on September 20, 2022, and continued until December 26, 2023. However, I noted 31 classes randomly. After each class observation, I sat to make observation notes. I was aware of the possible distractions I could make. So, I remained a silent observer. I mentioned my reflections each day in the observation note. After the observation class, I sat with the teachers for their reflections. I guided, discussed, and coordinated with them to apply critical pedagogy framework implementing activities, engagements, flipped classrooms, open dialogues, student-led discussions, and hearing students' voices in the classroom. They readily accepted and made efforts accordingly. I sat with them time and again to discuss, reflect, and interact on the application of critical pedagogy framework.

Information Analysis Process

Audio-taped conversations, observations, and field notes were transcribed and organized with Microsoft Word. The recorded interviews and observations for gathering data were translated where necessary. I made word-for-word transcriptions for further analysis. The transcribed information was printed. The printed copy of the transcribed interviews served as a working copy for checking the accuracy and

validity of the collected information during the interview. I let each participant confirm the accuracy of their transcribed interviews and verify that the transcription accurately represents their shared lived experiences. The interviews were conducted in English. However, two participants used Nepali when they did not feel comfortable to use English. So, I translated these portions in English. Then, I read the translated and the transcribed data individually for initial coding and categorization (Shaler et al., 2020) several times. I used ATLAS.ti 24 software to code the data. I just obtained ideas for coding from the software and made the necessary arrangements and organization manually. The categories were made under the themes that emerged as common responses of the student participants and the teacher participants that implied the same meaning and underlying concepts. Findings were these recurring patterns or themes supported by the data from which they were derived (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The next stage involved looking for connections between emerging themes, grouping them together according to conceptual similarities, and providing each cluster with a descriptive label (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Then, a phenomenological analysis was made, in this analysis, I found certain global themes generated from concurrent themes or underlying themes that were to be focused based on the research questions. I tried to recognize my participants' understanding of their own experiences, making this a double hermeneutic approach (Peoples, 2020) required for IPA.

For ethnographic analysis, I adopted an iterative and unstructured process; allowing for flexibility and adaptability during information collection and analysis. The process involved three key stages: description, analysis, and interpretation (Reeves et al., 2013). In the description, observations and participant narratives were documented in detail, capturing the essence of participants' experiences. Similarly, in

analysis, patterns, themes, and connections were identified through a continuous review of the data. Finally, in interpretation, I synthesized the insights emphasizing the meaning and significance of the studied phenomena in the context of the study.

As a phenomenological ethnographer, I interpreted and analyzed information by blending the depth of individual lived experiences with the breadth of the classroom context, using iterative reflection and thematic analysis to uncover the interplay between personal meaning and contextual influences. Guided by the concept of a hermeneutic circle, a back-and-forth movement from part to whole was preferred with co-construction of meaning constantly (Frechette et al., 2020; Peoples, 2020). The hermeneutic circle was the concept I adopted in interpretative research where understanding was developed through a dynamic process of moving between the whole and its parts. In this process, the meaning of individual elements was interpreted in the context of the larger whole, and the understanding of the whole was refined by analyzing its parts. This iterative approach helped uncover deeper insights and meanings. Further, the present research, adopting phenomenological ethnography design included organizing the interview results, coding the information, and developing themes from the coded information (Belotto, 2018) with the data explicated through observations and reflective notes.

The study followed multiple stages of interviews and observations to collect the required information. I scrutinized different stages for the refinement of the information. The stages followed gathering broad unstructured information, narrowing the focus to specific issues, revisiting participants for clarifications, observe recurring phenomena to avoid ambiguities. For further analysis, the interview questions based on the research questions were derived from the problem statement and cue into the context that I was able to better craft questions that guide

interpretation and explanation (Tracy, 2013). The themes were guided by the concept of exploring the lived experiences of the participants in connection to the components and dimensions of student agency. Besides, other themes guided the influence of the practice of pedagogy in classrooms to empower the agency of the students.

Making Meaning

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) state that qualitative research focuses on uncovering and interpreting the meanings embedded in the gathered data. In this process, I obtained information through unstructured interviews, field notes, reflections, and observations aligned with my research objectives and questions. Follow-up interviews were conducted until information saturation was achieved. Analysis of literature in phenomenological ethnography does not prescribe a single method for working with the information. A set of common principles, moving from the particular to the shared and from the descriptive to the interpretative, was applied, according to the analytic task (Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2020). In such qualitative research, as the interviewer, I undertook flexible collaboration to work with the respondents to identify and interpret the relevant meanings that were used to make sense of the research questions (Reid et al., 2005). However, analysis was seen as an iterative and inductive cycle (Smith, 2007), which proceeded by utilizing: reflection on preconceptions and processes of CP (Smith, 2007), close, line-by-line analysis (coding) of the experiential claims, concerns, and understandings of each participant (Larkin et al., 2006), identification of emergent patterns of commonality (themes) (Eatough & Smith, 2006), and, dialogue between the researchers and the information about what it might mean for participants to have these concerns in this context (Larkin et al., 2006), which led to the development of a more interpretative account individuals have multiple levels of consciousness of actions that could produce

transformative changes in responders' social life (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2012).

Conclusively, the process of meaning-making will continue through the interpretation and analysis to the conclusion itself.

Ethical Considerations

The word ethics comes from the Greek word 'ethos', which means 'character'. Ethics involve morality, integrity, fairness, and truthfulness (Leavy, 2017). "Ethical considerations affect all phases of the research process . . . the social context of the research, the relationship between the researcher and the researched" (Nigar, 2020, p. 15). As a researcher of qualitative inquiry, I gave utmost priority to ethical consideration on issues of participants' expressions and identity. Revealing the identity of a participant could be quite harmful (Lapan et al., 2012). I treated the people in my study with respect and courtesy. I considered that the fairness of data depended on the confidence and environment provided to the participants. Every aspect of dealing with the "who" of my study—the people involved—is an ethical decision (Leavy, 2017). Similarly, the quality of qualitative research is assessed based on how effectively the researcher provides evidence that their descriptions and analysis accurately reflect the reality of the situations and individuals studied (Lodico et al., 2010). To build up this situation, I considered all aspects of ethics throughout the study as it was a customary and advisable to address this final dimension of ethics (Leavy, 2017). Considering the ethical confidentiality, I unmasked the participants with pseudonyms.

Confidentiality

When considering research ethics, informed consent from participants, protecting them from harm, and ensuring confidentiality are common issues involved (Lodico et al., 2010). I assured the confidentiality of the participant's private

information. The information was used only for the purpose of this research. I assured the participants that their information would not be linked with any identifying information. I also ensured to only report cumulative findings through the report of the research, not individual-level information to the public.

Reflexivity

On my ontological stance, I believe in multiple realities. I have multiple reflective roles in the process of research. As phenomenological ethnographer, I showed my reflection in the process of information gathering and analysis. Reflexivity is one of the major strategies of quality control in qualitative research since it depicts the researcher's position in the whole process of research (Berger, 2015) balancing the emic and the etic perspectives. Therefore, I acknowledged what Finlay (2003, p. 118) believes about researcher reflexivity as a “process of continually reflecting upon our interpretations of both our experience and the phenomena being studied so as to move beyond the partiality of our previous understandings”. In phenomenological ethnography, a “relationship always exists between natural objects, memories, and judgments” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 46). Hence, I focused on the research participants and the phenomenon in its actual appearance in the processes.

Awareness and Sense-making

The participants in the interviews and the observed students were found unwilling to interact with their teachers. There was a common understanding that the teachers did not listen to their voices properly. However, I found half of the participants positive towards their teachers. They liked to keep interpersonal communication with their teachers and peers. This gave them a sense of keeping close to each other in the classrooms. For that reason, they developed a sense of awareness to keep in touch with the teachers and peers. Gradually, the students started being

inquisitive and critical in the classroom. Everyday experiences of questioning increased communicative environment in the classroom and beyond.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents a description of the methodology to give a foundation for the research. Initially, I presented interpretive paradigm as the choice of the study required by the assumption that realities can be interpreted. Further, research designs are presented succinctly. Phenomenology and ethnography have been described to clarify the simultaneous application of these approaches. To assess the aspects of student agency, I adopted a phenomenological approach, while to explore the practices of critical pedagogy, I employed an ethnographic method. To integrate these two distinct dimensions of the study, I used phenomenological ethnography as a blended research design. Additionally, this chapter also deals briefly with the researcher's philosophical stance: ontology, epistemology, and axiology in order to foreground the philosophical underpinning for the study.

Further, the chapter includes purposive sampling procedures to select the participants. Nilkantha Multiple Campus as a research site has briefly been presented. Tables are separately presented to show the profiles of the student participants and teacher participants. Additionally, the table gives the succinct view of observation details. Further, the chapter also deals about the procedures and approaches of information collection. Finally, ethical consideration and making meaning have made the chapter clear about the steps taken for maintaining ethics during the study.

Chapter Four

Empowerment and Influence of Pedagogy Through Components and Dimensions of Agency

This chapter deals with the explication of analysis of the information gathered mainly from the interviews and observations relating to the empowerment and the influence of pedagogy through the components and the dimensions of agency. They have been addressed through thematic analysis. The core themes incorporate sub-themes under each. Four core themes emerged out of the concurrent themes. In this chapter, I began with one of the core themes: Empowering Student Agency Through Supportive Educational Environments which aligns with the components of agency. Under this theme other sub-themes, curriculum and pedagogical approaches, teacher support and relationship, campus culture, and environment, extracurricular activities and programs and personal development and reflection are analyzed with evidence.

Empowering Agency Through Supportive Educational Environments

Describing the opportunities for students to exercise agency requires an understanding of how supportive their educational environment is. Not only the classroom but also the overall environment of the campus provides chances for the students to practice their agency. As a researcher, I made a prolonged ethnographic observation in the field. I witnessed many events, activities, and documents that are supportive of the practice of student agency. Thus, I have tried to explore the lived experiences of students and teachers through narrations to explicate the meanings in the process of practicing agency aligning with the practice of critical pedagogy under the following sub-themes.

Figure 4. Concurrent Themes Supporting to Empowering Agency Through Supportive Educational Environment

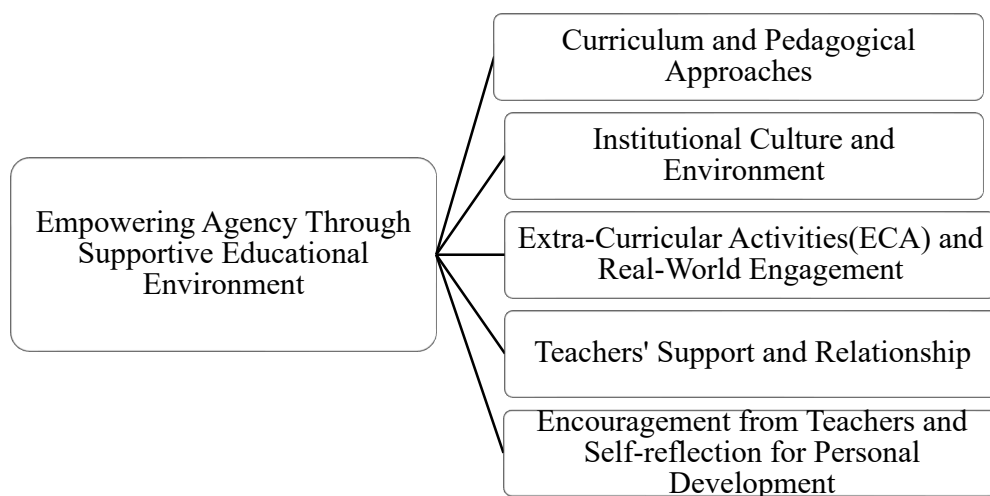


Figure 4 represents the global theme 'Empowering Agency Through Supportive Educational Environment' and the sub-themes. This shows the concept of empowering student agency within a supportive educational environment as a relational aspect of agency highlighting the importance of curriculum and pedagogical approaches in fostering critical thinking and autonomy, while institutional culture and environment create an inclusive space for growth. Extra-curricular activities (ECA) and real-world engagement provide practical experiences that connect academic learning to real-life contexts. The core theme has an association with the sub-themes. These are dealt with below.

Curriculum and Pedagogical Approaches

Pedagogy and curriculum both are the foundations for instilling agentic practices in the classroom and beyond. In this regard, teacher (T1) asserted that it was easier for teachers to practice student agency in the classroom when their curriculum provided necessary elements of agency. However, he noticed that there are no clear and direct instructions in the curriculum for teachers to practice agency (Sec Int, T1). Another teacher added, "Regarding the pedagogical use in the classroom, the

curriculum should guide us. Somehow, our curriculum provides some pedagogical instructions, but they are not sufficient and clear for practical purposes" (Frist Int, T2). He further added, "Activities are needed to involve students fully for boosting their linguistic ability. But our curriculum has not provided necessary instructions for activities and engagement aligning with the evaluation process". On one hand, teachers expect clear pedagogical instructions and guidance for proper implementation in the curriculum. On the other, they need to practice the pedagogy appropriately to meet the needs and interests of the student.

The students who want to exceed their ability in practice and excel in activities and engagement desire freedom from curricular boundaries. When they try to obliterate their fear of freedom of expression, they require a flexible curriculum to address their needs and desires. S3 stated, "It is important to give us chances to do the activities of our likes and interests. It should not be guided by curriculum and syllabus all the time. Therefore, we can improve our overall participation in the class which is helpful to kill our fear and develop our language skills" (First Int, S3). Regarding the pedagogy, S2 remarked, "The teacher who finds our interest and ability and gives chance to us, can enhance our social exposure in a good way" (First Int, S2). Relatedly, S5 opined, "When we find teachers with clear methods and approaches, we have more chances to improve us engaging in desired activities either given by the curriculum or out of it" (Sec Int, S5). To execute appropriate pedagogy for different agentic practices, the curriculum needs to be flexible. However, in some respects, it is necessary to provide specific and clear instructions for pedagogy. Additionally, teachers can show flexibility to accommodate necessary aspects comprising students' needs and interests. It is because teachers' pedagogies impact students' achievements in developing language skills. S4's understanding and experience showed that

teachers' pedagogy affects students' achievements. He did not prefer old-fashioned methods, but teachers were using them. He showed interest in inclusive pedagogy. He shared, "I like teachers who bring social and personal issues into the classroom. When teachers use student-centered pedagogies, we achieve more. I have examples that due to teacher's effective pedagogy I did well in exams and in practical aspects" (Sec Int, S4). Teachers' use of student-centric pedagogy addresses students' interests. Their interest helps to concentrate on the issues put on by teachers. Otherwise, they lose attention to teachers and the subject matter. In this regard, S3 shared, "Some teachers do not interact with us. They only talked one way. They just presented their lesson; they did not pay attention to our interest. So, we did not understand their contents" (Sec Int, S5). She further put:

Some teachers attract students' attention. At this time, we have full concentration to listen to them. When teachers do not care about students' interests and continue lecturing, we lose concentration. We chat each other in class. It finally affects our achievement. (Sec Int, S5)

This understanding shows that pedagogies and achievements are relative to each other. In this regard, T1 also agreed, "Pedagogy is one of the major factors that affect students' learning achievement. Traditional pedagogy prevents students from being active. ... Engaging students through critical pedagogy helps shape students' learning habits so it will finally have an effect on their critical thinking ability. This is helpful in achievement of learning" (Sec Int, T1). Similar to this understanding, S1 remarked, "Teachers' use of pedagogy affects our understanding. We all students want good and positive responses and remarks from our teachers. But when teachers become negative towards our work, we are disheartened" (Sec Int, S1). She further believed that students could change their understanding of being a teacher when they

found teachers with effective pedagogical practices. She said, "Looking at one of my teachers' classes and his idea of participatory activities and approaches, I thought to be a teacher like him. Nowadays, as a novice teacher, I'm following his ideas in my classrooms" (First Int, S1). However, students do not find all teachers like him. They are worried when they get teachers without student-centric pedagogies. S3 put:

We feel so bored. We start reading and watching to count the time. We thought it was a very long class. Friends started talking and making noise. We often go out during their periods. We go to the canteen and restrooms. Go out and stroll without reason. Anyway, we want to kill his period by attending less in his classroom. (First Int, S3)

When teachers play a dominant role in traditional pedagogy, classrooms are not interesting for the students. When the teachers follow traditional pedagogies, the students do not show interest in teachers' presentations. They want their teacher to go with the pedagogy that incorporates their needs and choices.

These experiences show that students are willing to be taught by teachers who incorporate their interests and choices. They find themselves motivated by the pedagogies adopted by the teachers. In one observation class, I found students excited when the teacher used approaches that incorporated their voices and choices. He allowed students to freely express their ideas on the topic of "National Unity" without evaluating them. The topic was not directly related to the curriculum. It was an open-mic discussion. They criticized all political parties and leaders and supported national players who had good roles in uniting citizens through sports (Obv Cl, 19). This shows that when students encounter issues of their interest and freedom to express themselves, they take opportunities to improve speaking skill.

The curriculum itself needs to incorporate necessary aspects for students' agentic practices as it is not limited to classroom strategies, teaching aids, curricular objectives and evaluation (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Thus, the teachers can have access to the contents or aspects related to agency and can shape necessary pedagogies to implement in classroom. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the potential effects of curriculum contents and instructions for exercising agency in the classroom (Manyukhina & Wyse, 2019). Thus, curriculum prescribed by the university and pedagogies applied by the teachers play a crucial role for developing agency of the students.

Institutional Culture and Environment

Campus as an institution holds the cultural practices for academic achievement. The classroom practices overall represent the culture of the whole institution. Both the culture and the environment play a significant role in shaping the academic performances of students and teachers. T1 said, "How students do and show their activities and performances depends on the culture and the environment we have given on the campus. Our campus culture represents our students' behaviors. They shape their future according to the culture we have provided (Sec Int, T1). The practice of creating a good culture and a positive environment is the combined effort of the teachers and students. However, teachers can influence students to learn creating a good environment in the classroom. S5 stated that only a few teachers created a good environment in the classroom where they got equal chances to learn and share. She said that some teachers never cared and shared with her, so she did not like to be in their classes (Sec Int, S5). Students prefer the teachers who create a good environment in the classroom. They pay attention to the teachers who make an interesting classroom environment. It means that if the teachers cannot create a

positive environment for learning, students do not like to listen to them. This affects students' achievement. T1 said, "My experiences say that if I could not make a good environment in the classroom, students did not listen to me. They ignored what I presented. This ultimately affects their ability to succeed" (Sec Int, T1). Teacher's presentations also affect the teaching-learning environment. When the teachers cannot address students' interests, the students do not prefer to learn. Students' preferences for interesting presentations by the teachers make a difference in the learning environment.

S1 shared:

I felt bored in some classes. I wanted to quit. I read my watch many times in class. Teachers give a whole-time lecturer. I think they feel that the class is only for them. There is not a minute for students. In such an environment I feel lazy, inactive, and dull. I do not prefer these classes. I could not remember the things taught and did not like to speak there (Sec Int, S1).

This shows that Students prefer interesting interaction in the classroom. They feel bored with one-way presentations by teachers. They lose concentration. When they find interactive teachers their attention toward content remains active. They want to be involved in discussions to understand the contents. Otherwise, they like to give up.

Culture and environment influence both teachers' and students' involvement inside and outside the classroom. When students get a favorable environment in the classroom to discuss the matter being taught, they think they get a good academic culture. For them, teachers' presentations matter. S5 said, "Some teachers do not interact with us. They only talk one way. They just present their lesson; they do not

pay attention to our interests. So, we do not understand their contents. This is not a good environment for learning" (Sec Int, S5). These remarks justify that teachers' presentations are crucial to creating an effective environment on campus. My experiences show that when the institution can foster a conducive teaching-learning environment, there is a higher chance that students prefer the teachers teaching there. It is because I found students' positive reactions to the campus. This has a direct relation to the students' positive reflections towards the teachers working there. Besides, when the curriculum integrates necessary elements, it is easier for teachers to implement agency through pedagogical practices (Manyukhina & Wyse, 2019) creating an interesting and learner-friendly environment. However, this is not easier for teachers when the curriculum does not comprise the expected components for creating interesting or learners-friendly teaching-learning culture in the institution. This hinders the development of students' capacity.

Similarly, the environment has a major role in enacting agency, since the agency is not enacted by an individual rather it emerges through the mutual relationship between the teacher and the environment (Namgung, 2024). Thus, teachers are major actors in creating a conducive learning environment where students feel comfortable and empowered to express themselves. A classroom that aligns with students' interests and needs fosters a sense of belonging and encourages active participation.

When students feel supported and valued by their teachers, they are more likely to engage in activities, take risks, and explore their potential. Teachers can achieve this by being attentive to individual learning styles, offering opportunities for students to share their ideas, and creating a safe space for open dialogue. When the environment nurtures agency, students become more motivated and confident, leading

to greater academic and personal growth. By cultivating this supportive atmosphere, teachers help students unlock their full potential, allowing them to take charge of their learning and thrive in the process.

Teachers' Support and Relationship

Academically, teachers deal with the educational-related problems of their students. Through personal support, teachers provide personal assistance to their needs. As a counsellor, the teachers always guide their students in academic and psychological aspects. These supports in the classroom and outside build up confidence among students. S1 described a similar experience, "Teacher's support and relation affects my personality development. I built up the confidence to share him openly and ask him for further guidance. Trust between teachers and me increases. I feel more pleasure when my teacher supports me (laughs)" (Sec Int, S1). She further claimed that teachers' support has increased her self-confidence, courage, and learning habits.

Teacher's support and good relationship are expected by the students who want to do their tasks. They wish to get teachers who are helpful and supportive. In my class observations, I found students expecting support from the teachers. They remained silent when their turn came for presentation. When the teacher simply asked them to present, they did not respond. When he spoke in a supportive manner, some students showed interest. They were ready for presentation (Class Obv, 8). One student became ready to present. The teacher patted her with a smile. She was filled with confidence and took a class for 22 minutes. Her friends remarked, "Excellent! We like your confidence and ways of engaging us" (Class Obv, 8). S1 acknowledged her teacher for supporting her to take the class. She said, "It was possible due to your support. Your trust in me always put me higher" (Class Obv, 8). Similarly, S3

remarked, "I am getting help from my teachers so that I am doing good in learning. I felt that I had the power to do something when my teachers supported me. It increased self-respect and self-trust. I can speak fluently" (First Int, S3). Teachers' supports build up trust in each other. It creates good relationships between teachers and students.

A good relationship keeps students motivated to put in effort despite their unwillingness. This helps to boost their morale and ability to take responsibility. S4 had a similar experience. He did not have the courage to present in a seminar, so OT2 encouraged him, "... You can present in the program. Do not feel that you are weak. I know you are strong in presentation. Do it" (Cl Onv. 18). He presented in the event. He claimed that he was not ready to present in the seminar. However, teachers and peers encouraged and supported him to do so. His teacher helped him find out the topic and related materials. The presentation helped him develop skills in presentation avoiding fear. He shared, "I trembled the first time. Nowadays, I can present and speak on issues easily. It was all possible due to my teachers' support" (First Int, S3).

It is natural that students seek support from their teachers and peers. When teachers are supportive students get benefits from their friends too. Supporting cultures teaches students to be helpful to each other. In a helpful environment, the relationship among students and teachers strengthens. Supporting each other creates learning interest for students. They want to learn from each other. They can get ideas from friends. Friends' supports help them understand what teacher could not make clear. When students have good relationships with their teachers and friends, they can solve different personal problems.

Further, teachers' support encourages students to face difficult tasks. When students feel that the task is difficult for them, they tend to withdraw it. They may

perform the task with the support of the teachers. This also creates understanding among teachers and students that sets out ground for positive relationships in classrooms and beyond.

Extracurricular Activities (ECA) and Real-World Engagement

The campus where I made observations conducted ECA regularly to its schedule. In my observations, all students did not seem active in participating in ECA. However, some students showed much interest in taking part in ECA. S6 claimed, "I do not like to attend class every day. It is boring. It will be interesting to take part in the extra-curricular activities that I have choices" (Sec Int, S6). All students are not equal. They possess different talents, desires, and interests. ECA provides opportunities for students to channel their interests in a particular program. They can perform and show talents among friends and teachers. In this regard, S3 considered, "I have different interests and desires. I can show my talent in the programs I like. I cannot fulfill my interest in sitting all the time in the classroom and listening to teachers" (Sec Int, S4). Similarly, S2 expressed, "I do not like to miss the debate competition where I can express my opinion freely". (Sec. Int, S2). ECA provides a platform for students to discover and develop their hidden talents, allowing them to dedicate time and effort to their passions. Their willingness helps to enhance their ability. T1 said:

Those who willingly take part in extra-curricular activities are enhancing their capacity. I have seen this. Many students who are employed now, were good in ECA. They learned skills and ideas from ECA and apply in their job and daily life. (First Int, T1)

Students build up confidence to do activities and gain knowledge and skills through the programs. They can apply the knowledge and skills in their social life. S2

claimed, "I can deliver a speech in my village in *Losar* programs. I learned it from ECA conducted in my campus. I often take part in debate competitions so that I have improved my skill of speaking" (First Int, S2).

While choosing the program, the teacher's role is to find out the interests of their students. Students take part accordingly. T1 shared his experience, "Last year when I conducted a series of debate programs for three weeks, many students developed their speaking skills in English" (Sec Int, T1). S3 put, "I have learned to speak well when I took part in last year's continuous debate programs conducted by our teacher in classrooms" (Sec Int, S3). Students who are involved in ECA could enhance their potential in the world of real life. Their success in activities promotes leadership skills. S1 regreted, "I got a chance to develop my leadership skills when I took part in two seminars conducted by the Department of English. I knew this type of program increased my capacity but I regret that I did not utilize all" (Sec Int, S1).

Students who were involved in the activities got direct benefits for their all-round development. T1 presented, "It's my regular practice. I conduct extra activities every Friday. I request them to recite poems, gajal, sing songs, tell jokes, etc". He further added, "I asked the shy students to recite by sitting in the beginning then standing from their seat. Later, they performed standing in front of the class" (First Int, T2). Aligning this, S3 had a similar experience, "Once I had a chance to recite a poem in the class I did just sitting on the bench. When I did, I felt I was able to do it. The next day, I tried reciting a poem in front of the class. I did well. Now, I do not hesitate to present my creations any time in any place" (First Int, S3).

These experiences show that when teachers conduct extra activities, their students get a chance to present creativity inside the classrooms. When the activities align with the interests of the students, there is no problem of involvement. The

students themselves take the initiative to conduct the programs. On one hand, they gradually improve their ability to present their ideas and thoughts beyond the classroom. On the other hand, they improve creativity skills in writing and presenting. Their involvement in the activities fosters a sense of competitiveness among them. This will have a positive effect on their learning habit.

When students get a chance to promote themselves in their respective classrooms through ECA, they develop their skills and boost up confidence to present in their real-life situations. Therefore, such activities are not to be limited to the classrooms. When activities take place within classrooms or institutional settings, students are provided with valuable opportunities to enhance their skills in organizing, leading, and presenting. These events allow them to take responsibility, solve problems, and develop their communication abilities. By engaging in these activities, students not only refine their academic knowledge but also gain confidence in their ability to manage real-world tasks. The hands-on experience of planning and presenting fosters both personal growth and the development of key competencies necessary for success beyond the classroom.

Encouragement from Teachers and Self-reflection for Personal Development

Cultivating agency through self-directed learning, critical thinking, problem-solving, reflection, and feedback equips students with a strong foundation for achieving long-term goals. In this, students put their own mind and heart into fixing their goals. They are self-driven for practicing and doing the things they need and want. They set up learning goals themselves. S6 said, "I set a learning goal myself. When I make my own goal, I am determined to accomplish it. Now it is clear that I am studying for me. So, my understanding level is also increasing" (First Int, S6). Similarly, S1 shared her experiences that after joining Bachelor she started thinking

differently about her responsibilities. She mentioned, "I got teachers who encouraged me to find my goal in B. Ed. second year. I thought a lot and decided to be a permanent teacher. After two years, now I am a permanent teacher. This credit goes to my teachers" (First Int, S1). She is convinced that teachers can encourage students to change themselves. S5 had an experience where she started having self-directed learning from her teachers' encouragement. She said, "Previously, I did not like to focus on my study. David (pseudo name) sir opened my eyes. His continuous encouragement changed my perception of life.... Then, my self-determination and self-driven learning have empowered me to achieve in final examinations and develop my language skills" (Sec Int, S5).

The experience of S1 reveals that students who are self-driven in their studies, do not want to miss time without doing or studying something. When they missed the time, they immediately recovered. She shared, "When I am out from home without books and reading materials, I feel that I am not doing anything.... Then, I immediately focus my time on studying. I must thank my teachers who inspire me to develop this habit" (Sec Int, S1). Students with a self-driven nature cultivate the habit of recovering time and effort for learning. They envision that their self-efforts or self-directed learning empowers them to set up learning goals.

In the classroom, self-reflection of students through critical thinking activities involves encouraging students to evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information. It promotes an environment where students are encouraged to question assumptions and consider different perspectives on identifying voices. Students develop the ability to solve problems creatively and make informed decisions engaging in critical thinking. It also helps to understand the complex issues navigating real-world challenges. Self-critical reflection of the student marks that they are conscious and worried about their

level of understanding. In a class observation, OT2 applied the technique of 'critiquing peer'. He gave a topic to each peer and asked one member to talk for four minutes. Another member of the peer was asked to listen and criticize their friend in two minutes. I found students interested in criticizing others. They did (Obv, C1 28). They felt the differences between them and their friends. S6 exhibited his critical reflection in the way he was alert about his challenges. He said, "Challenges are a part of life. I must overcome them. First, I made up my mind to overcome them, then I started acting. In my experience, I overcame many challenges" (Sec Int, S6).

This feeling of confidence arising from self-reflection makes students self-determined and self-oriented. In a similar context, S1 put a strong determination, "There is a vast difference between the work that I have done with my efficacy and the work with others's influence. When I do for myself with my own conviction, I do better than the influence made by others" (Sec Int, S1). This reflection highlights the importance of self-efficacy and autonomy in performing and achieving tasks. It increases the quality of work. It suggests that besides teachers' encouragement, the students perform better when they are self-guided by their own convictions. This insight of the students is the product of their ability to think critically.

In an environment where students are encouraged to express their opinions critically, they can excel because they grab the opportunity to pursue their interests. S3 presented her experiences, "When I got a chance to put my voice critically, I could do the activities of my interest, I happily did and learned" (First Int, S3). Similarly, S4 shared, "I take ownership of my learning achievement myself involved in activities and being engaged in critical thinking. For this, we must have a flexible classroom environment" (First Int, S4). By adopting flexible practices such as open discussion, peer interactions, group work, etc., teachers can provide them the opportunities to be

self-reflective and critical. Otherwise, students feel depressed and will not like to be involved in further interactions critically. Presented her feeling, "...When I answered the teachers, they never showed satisfaction. ... I had another example. Our teacher agreed on the wrong answer of talented ones, but they did not agree on my answer which was correct. (in multiple-choice items). See! What happened at that moment to us" (Surprising with furious mood) (First Int, S1).

This phenomenon captures the view that teachers who do not listen to students push them into dejection. After some day's observations, I convinced teachers to adopt open discussions methods in classrooms. They did. Students started questioning critically to teachers critically in such open discussions. One of the students said, "Sir why don't you listen to us about our interest? We have different choices, but you want to impose on us your choice of destination for our educational tour" (Obv, Cl 7).

This example shows that students can express their inner feelings or self-reflection when the teachers set the contexts. They can directly question on teacher's impositions. When students are aware of their responsibilities and relationship with teachers, they tend to question and put queries directly to the teachers. Thus, it is necessary to foster a culture of trust, collaboration, and understanding to create meaningful opportunities for students to exercise their agentic practices through critical thinking and problem-solving approaches. These will be helpful for the personal development of the students.

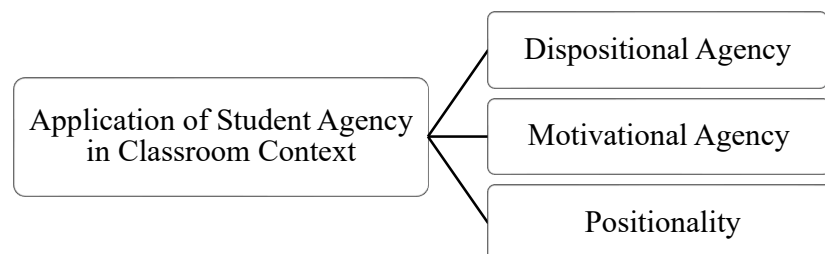
Moreover, the experiences shared by the students highlight the importance of a supportive and flexible classroom environment in fostering critical thinking and self-expression. When students are given the chance to voice their opinions critically, they feel more engaged and motivated to pursue activities that align with their interests, as shown by the experiences of the students about doing activities.

Similarly, some students emphasize that taking ownership of their learning requires a flexible environment that encourages participation, interaction, and reflection. This flexibility allows students to become more self-reflective and involved in their learning, which enhances their sense of agency.

Application of Student Agency in Classroom Context

This global theme encapsulates how students utilize different dimensions of agency through their educational journey of language learning. It deals with three themes: dispositional, motivational and positionality as the dimension of student agency (Vaughn et al., 2020). Students apply the dimensions of their agency: dispositional, motivational, and positionality at various junctures and in different ways within their classroom as well as social and personal contexts. Here is an examination and explanation of when and how these dimensions come into play based on the vignettes, verbatims, and information collected through interviews, observations, and reflections. These are presented under the global theme "Application of Student Agency in Classroom Context" with related sub-themes as presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5. The Concurrent Themes Supporting the Global Theme: Application of Student Agency in Classroom Context



Dispositional Agency

Dispositional dimension aligns closely with Bandura's personal agency, where individuals self-regulate, make choices, and influence their environments rather than being passive recipients of external forces (Bandura, 1999). In the classroom context, dispositional agency relates to students' proactive engagement in learning.

Self-efficacy and Strategies: Navigating Challenges. Using self-efficacy by the students in the process of learning means putting inner efforts wholeheartedly to promote their learning behaviour. Past performance is considered an important component in fostering self-efficacy (Rhew et al., 2018). Students' inherent attitudes, beliefs, and dispositions of their past are key factors to enhance self-efficacy. The self-efficacy of students provides them with the basis for setting goals. S6 shared, "I feel my friends and teachers will dominate me if I do not do the things in time. So, I determine myself to finish the given assignments before the due date and time" (First Int, S6). In another way, he believed that calling individual students names by teachers encourages them to follow teachers' advice. Otherwise, he liked to remain inactive. He further expressed, "When teachers did not call my name, I did not like to discuss. I liked to be called by names. At that time, I felt my presence. Otherwise, I remained silent" (First Int, S6). This type of inherent attitude of the students may bring positive results by the consideration from teachers. However, some attitudes of the students pave the way to a negative upbringing. S5 believed that due to teachers' behaviors, she remained silent in class and often wanted to quit the class. She put her aggression, "Teachers made me feel to quit in class. It's because they quite often take only a few students' names in the class. The teachers often called the names of one or two talented students only. I felt jealous and sad. So, I could not tolerate it. I thought of quitting their classes for this reason" (First Int, S5). This indicates that teachers'

behaviors affect students' presence and activeness in the class. Individual students wanted to be called by their names. When teachers favor some students, others notice this and show indifference towards the teachers. This feeling of bias affects the growth of students' self-efficacy.

In the context of personal development, self-efficacy and setting goals are closely linked. Self-efficacy as the belief in one's ability to achieve in learning significantly influences goal-setting behavior. When self-efficacy increases, the persons feel that the setting goal is their own responsibility. Students feel excited depending on the goal at hand (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). S3 said, "In the past, it was parents' force. I thought I had to learn for them. Now, I know my potential that I must set goals myself. My teachers helped me find out my potential giving me chances to do many things in the classrooms" (First Int, S3). S4 had a similar view, "I was unaware of my potential. So, I always hesitated to initiate the tasks. My teachers put a lot of effort into changing me. They provided me with chances to work myself with their support. Due to this, now, I like to do things myself" (Sec Int, S4). Students who have a sense of increasing self-efficacy take initiative. S5 shared an experience:

I have an experience. Last year, I did not understand what the teacher taught in the class. He could not make me understand. So, I read the subject myself at home and I passed easily. Due to this success, nowadays, I believe in myself for making further plans of study. (First Int, S5)

This confidence in their capabilities and their own strategies in facing difficulty drives them to take proactive steps, maintain motivation, and achieve their objectives. S6 shared that he had a long gap in his studies. After joining college, he came to know the importance of education. He believed that he has grown self-

efficacy due to his efforts in studies. He said, "Now, I am doing a bachelor's degree. I want to be a permanent secondary teacher and do PhD in my life. This interest drives me to continue my study. I believe that it is the outcome of my self-efficacy developed in classrooms" (Sec Int, S6). When individuals possess high self-efficacy, they are more likely to set challenging goals and persist in the face of obstacles. At many points in the past, S5 wanted to give up studies but she committed to continue. She strongly put, "Now, I do not escape. I like to face. If others said not to continue reading, I won't leave" (First Int, S5). This determination encourages a growth mindset, resilience, and a proactive approach to learning as traits of distortional agency. S1 showed a similar attitude. She remarked, "I believe in the importance of education and knowledge. So, I convinced myself to struggle hard to achieve something in life. My self-determination always empowers me (Sec Int, S1).

Equally, setting and accomplishing goals can enhance self-efficacy by providing tangible evidence of one's competence and reinforcing a positive cycle of achievement. As students successfully reach their goals, they gain confidence in their abilities, which motivates them to take on more complex challenges. The process of setting clear, manageable objectives allows them to break down larger tasks into achievable steps, making the challenges seem less daunting. Additionally, as students employ strategies to overcome obstacles, each success serves as proof of their growing skills, further strengthening their belief in their capacity to succeed. This cycle of setting, achieving, and reflecting fosters a deeper sense of self-efficacy, encouraging students to face future challenges with greater resilience and optimism.

Broadly, resilience and optimism encourage students' self-efficacy and confidence in their ability to succeed. Students use self-efficacy to set realistic and challenging goals, believing in their ability to achieve them (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999).

It gives a way out to behave and creates a motivator for it affecting the goal-setting function of self-regulation. Using self-efficacy by the students in the process of learning means putting inner efforts wholeheartedly to promote their scopes, personality, and learning achievements through motivating behaviour (Ponton et al., 2009). Teachers also have roles to set and promote the learning goals of students coping with the challenges with suitable strategies.

Growth Mindset. Students with a growth mindset embrace challenges for learning and personal development. They learn from criticism and see efforts as a path to accomplishment. While talking to participants, I tried to explore experiences of their past which have mostly guided them for their present and future endeavors in terms of growth mindset. S4 believed that his past experiences were not good for his studies. It was because of his lack of a growing mindset. Later, he found that learning capacity increases through different activities and engagements. He agreed, "When I was involved in activities, it was easy to understand the topic and the matter fast. Through activities and engagements in the classrooms, I enhanced my ability to do personal and social undertakings. I did not know this in the past" (First Int, S4).

While making a sense of students' growth mindset they want opportunities in different aspects. They like to accept criticism as they believe it is helpful to shape their minds. S6 shared his feeling that when he got criticisms from friends and teachers, he had the chance to "increase ideas for interpretations, enhance talking habits, avoid shyness and fear" (First Int, S6). From this experience, the students understood that setbacks were opportunities for learning and growth rather than reflections of innate limitations. They utilized the experiences to "develop proficiency in studies as well as in social life" (First Int, S3). S6 listened and followed his teachers. He further put, "When life goes ahead, I automatically grow with many ups

and downs. I tried to adapt to any situation and faced many obstacles. I have achieved this many times by avoiding the obstacles. I learned these from classrooms" (Sec Int, S6). His growth mindset accepted the barriers as natural things. Students struggle to achieve despite the obstacles. This is the growth mindset that shows the changes in thoughts. The thought comes out as an action. S3 experienced similar changes. She expressed:

I thought that I could not upgrade my students' English teaching at a remote school. I tried. Finally, there were many changes. My students are good in English now. I have been declared the best English teacher from my Rural Municipality. It's real now but I did not think this would happen. As I grew, I realized that many things are possible. (Sec Int, S3)

Students with a growth mindset accept challenges, and changes and keep continuous efforts. It helps to persist in the face of setbacks. They come up with new ideas and thinking. S4 underwent a similar experience, "I thought of my changes in life. I overview my friends, relationships. I am careful nowadays to choose friends. Sometimes, bad company spoiled my good habits and time. So, I am conscious now" (Sec Int, S4). Students with a growth mindset not only change their minds but also accept feedback from their friends and teachers. S6 understood that scolding and reprimands were the forms of feedback that helped to avoid mistakes and wrong deeds. He said, "Sometimes teachers scold us that is good for our wrong habits. I put interest in positive teachers' guidance. I remembered more when I was guided by positive teachers" (Sec Int, S6). He further added, "I am mostly grown up by the support of my teachers in the field of English learning and teaching, listening to their suggestions and following their paths" (Sec Int, S6).

The information shows that participants believe on self-enhanced growth mind set which has connection to their past achievements and failures. Students with growth mindset can develop intelligence through dedication, hard work, and continuous learning (Dweck, 1986). They understand that failure is a part of the learning process and are more likely to seek out feedback and use it constructively. This mindset fosters resilience, creativity, and a love of learning, which are essential for personal growth.

Embracing the growth mindset allows students to view their abilities as dynamic and capable of improvement through effort, persistence, and learning from experiences. Rather than seeing failure as a setback, students with a growth mindset see it as an opportunity for growth. They understand that mistakes are a natural part of the learning process, and that each failure provides valuable insights into how they can improve their approach. These students tend to be more resilient, as they focus on the process of learning rather than just the outcome. When faced with challenges, they are more likely to persist, re-evaluate their strategies, and adjust their methods to achieve success. This mindset fosters a continuous cycle of improvement, where each past failure becomes a steppingstone toward future achievements. By recognizing that abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication and hard work, students with a growth mindset unlock their full potential and cultivate a lifelong love for learning.

Coping Capacity of Students. Resilience involves developing the ability to effectively respond to and recover from challenges and adversities. Through my observations in classrooms, I found many students lacking skills to encompass flexibility, mental strength, and an optimistic outlook which are key traits of coping capacity. They do not like to face difficult problems. T1 shared the same experiences,

"All students do not attempt difficult issues or problems. They grow fear that they cannot do. But few students with their own efficacy they try, they do not give up" (Sec Int, T1). Students in the beginning grew fear and wanted to withdraw from their studies. Later they faced the challenges. S5 mentioned her experience:

Yes, really many times, I thought of quitting my studies. Once I had a strong feeling of quitting the study when our university published first-year results. I found many of my seniors who were considered talented failed. So thought to discontinue the study. (Sec Int, S5)

Many students looking at the bad results of their senior batches wanted to quit their studies. S3 shared a similar thought, "Really, many times I thought of quitting my studies when I faced difficulties and saw bad results" (Sec Int, S3). When she got difficult topics, she felt similar, "I get this situation many times. I found some topics very difficult. I read many times, but I could understand nothing. At that point, I lost hope and thought of quitting" (Sec Int, S3). Students with weak mindsets often like to quit. Their flexibility and adaptability seem weak. When their tolerance and optimistic outlook overcome them, they recover and set back soon. S1 put, "Through hard work and dedication. I knew I have to work hard and put dedication to achieve. Negative feelings come but I should not give up" (Sec Int, S1). She added, "Many times, I read but nothing understood. At that point, I lost hope and thought of quitting. But later, I realized that I needed to do more and get success. So, again I read until I understood" (Sec Int, S1). S6 also shared a similar experience, "I mostly focus on examination. I practiced a lot until I knew. Sometimes, I felt I could not do it, wanted to quit but my inner conscience told me to continue and get achievement how hard it was" (Sec Int, S6).

All participants expressed their feeling of resignation that came many times during their study. However, many of them reserved the feeling and setback to their studies. S4 made an expression, "Sometimes, I think of quitting the hard work and studies. When I listened to friends, teachers, and family I wanted to continue. I listened to stories of the struggles of seniors. These stories also motivated me to continue working hard. I again set up" (Sec Int, S4). S5 had an experience that when she quit her studies, she had a very bad feeling. It was very difficult for her to pass one year. She again rejoined.

All participants expressed their feelings of resignation which came many times during their study. However, they set back themselves. Not only in student life, but in every part of life a person encounters lots of failures. The person having resilience can set back quickly from difficulties and adapt to change (Adhikari, 2020). By accepting change and keeping proactive mindset, resilient students can turn failures into opportunities for growth and learning. They see failure as the foundation for moving forward in the path of learning achievement.

By adopting flexibility, mental strength, and an optimistic outlook, students can better manage stress, adapt to changing circumstances, and maintain a positive perspective even in adversity. This ability to stay focused and resilient allows them to not only overcome challenges but also thrive in various areas of their lives, from academic pursuits to personal relationships. Ultimately, these traits help students develop the emotional intelligence needed to navigate life's complexities with confidence and determination.

Motivational Agency

Agency in students comprises their self-belief, internal drive, and proactive behavior in pursuing academic and personal growth. Under the theme of

"Motivational Agency" three sub-themes; extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation, and demotivation are dealt with here.

Intrinsic Motivation Vs Extrinsic Motivation. Intrinsic motivation does not seek separate consequences or external rewards. It arises from a person's internal will. It occurs when an individual takes part in an action for enjoyment implied in the activity itself (Howard et al., 2016). In the interviews, the participants accepted that mostly they were driven by their self-motivation. However, they agreed that intrinsic motivation was not an absolute factor. S3 agreed, "Both inner and outer sources motivate me. Mainly, I am motivated by the inner self. External sources are also important. For me, 70% motivation is inner-self and 30% from the external sources" (Sec Int, S3). Similarly, S1 said, "Mostly, I am self-motivated. I believe on my own. I believe myself 75%. I do not make decisions quickly from other's influence" (Sec Int, S1).

Sources of motivation differ at different levels. The participants revealed that their motivational source was family and teachers in the school age. At a higher level, they experienced that internal sources of motivation are more important than external ones. S6 shared, "I was motivated by the external sources such as family and others in my school life. Now, I am self-motivated. I believe in myself, so I am internally motivated" (Sec Int, S6). Motivation comes in the form of dreams also. The dream internally guides a person to achieve. S3 said, "I do not have outer factors. I have some dreams. I want to be a secondary English teacher. This dream pushes me to work hard" (Sec Int, S3). This is the self-motivation guided by her dream. When students are intrinsically motivated, they work hard to achieve. S4 remarked, "For making a good career, meeting my dream, and learning new knowledge I work hard. I put in continuous efforts without external influences, I am self-guided" (Sec Int, S4).

S3 also had a similar experience, "I am active. It is for my career. I knew I must do the things being pro-active. I should be self-guided to achieve, not by any external rewards and influences" (Sec Int, S3).

In my classroom observations, I found that students who claimed to be driven by their internal motivation engaged in classroom activities. They attempted more and accomplished the given tasks in time. T1 agreed that students who were self-motivated were doing good. He said, "I find mostly intrinsic motivation in good students. Students who are driven by themselves are doing well" (Sec Int, T1). T2 also accepted that students being motivated intrinsically can perform better. He also believed that extrinsic motivation plays an important role in shaping students' positive thinking (First Int, T2).

From these experiences of teachers and students, it can be claimed that intrinsic motivation arises from within the individual students, driven by personal interest, curiosity, and dream for self-improvement. Activities they involve in are intrinsically motivated aligning with one's passions and values providing a sense of fulfillment and meaning. Conclusively, fostering intrinsic motivation leads to creativity, engagement and sustained effort, as individual students are motivated by the activities itself rather than by external pressures or rewards.

In comparison to intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation may not always lead to long-term engagement or deeper understanding of the materials. Extrinsic motivation can be effective in encouraging short-term compliance or effort to the performance of the activity to gain separable achievement (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Generally, students are affected with small rewards, good grades, and punishments. But in higher level, this does not work. Higher level students are guided by self-motivation so that they can bring sustained change in their life. Higher level students

may seek immediate rewards, but they mostly focus on their long-term goals in the form of dreams and desires. The internal and external factors that drive to the desire or willingness to do something concerning to direction, energy, and persistence (Deci et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2006). Motivational agency primarily focuses on the driving forces behind students' actions and choices. Teachers need to involve in understanding what motivates students to engage in learning and pursuing their goals.

Demotivation. During interviews and informal talks, I found that every participant had lived experiences of demotivation in the course of their student life. Teachers' negative feedback or responses triggered them. S1 shared her experiences and that she was shocked by the insults of her teachers. She presented evidence:

When teachers insulted me in class I was saddened. One day, I presented in a class. My teacher remarked to me that it was not a standard presentation as required by the level. He harassed me giving negative remarks. Such behaviors obviously demotivated me. I felt why I joined the college. (Sec Int, S1)

She provided other evidence also. Once, she showed her classwork to a teacher. He did not take much interest in seeing her works. Instead, he agreed with the answer of another student although her answer was correct. S4 also shared a similar example, "I have some evidence. Once my teacher gave different marks to me and my friend. We had written the same answer. There was no difference in our writings, but he allowed five marks for her and three marks for me. This discrimination made me very sad" (First Int, S4). He also shared that his teachers did not bother to take his name in the class. They often called one or two names. S5 said, "Teachers supported mostly the works of talented students. They called their names and focused on their answers rather than ours" (First Int, S5). Similarly, S6 expressed, "I feel bad now

when my teachers checked and are concerned about only talented students in the class. It is a kind of discrimination. I wanted to drop out of the class" (First Int, S6). This has an adverse effect on student's thinking and feeling. S3 felt the same, "If teachers do not call me, I think he is not paying me attention. My motivation goes down" (First Int, S3). Students do not like to be engaged when their teachers do not give them individual attention. S6 had a similar experience, "When they do not call our names and let us interact in mass I do not like to discuss. We do not interact. I like to be called by names. At that time, I feel my presence" (First Int, S6). He further added:

This is not good. It affects their studies. It hampers in remembering what teachers teach in class. I have one experience. One of my teachers did not allow me to present my answers in class. Then, I never thought of giving an answer to that teacher. I never questioned him. I believe he killed my desire. (First Int, S6)

Responding to students by their names, giving them equal opportunities, and treating them fairly are ways to avoid demotivation. However, participants shared much evidence of discrimination, unequal treatment, and biases in looking at their tasks. S4 put, "Teachers gave more chances to few students to speak, to present. Many of us had to remain silent, just listening to them. Very few chances came to me. Some teachers never asked other weak students" (First Int, S4). He further added, "Teachers have students of their choice. They give more attention to them, not to all students. I am not happy with this" (First Int, S4). S5 shared a similar experience, "They only check homework of talented students. They do not like to see ours. They do not ask whether we have done homework or not. So that we do not like to do again" (First Int, S5). In this regard, teachers also agreed that if they do not pay attention equally and

properly, students will not respond to teachers in the future. He shared, "There may be one or two events in some years. When I knew that students asked questions intentionally for asking shake, I did not respond. They might have felt negative. They stopped talking to me" (First Int, T1). He further added, "It surely happens. If I do not listen and answer them in time, they will be frustrated. They will stop asking me and writing homework. It hampers their speaking and writing skills" (First Int, T2). In addition to this, teacher's judgment of students demotivates them. When students do not get fair evaluations, they show apathy in learning. S2 opined, "I find my friends silent. They fear being judged by the teacher" (First Int, S2). S1 also agreed that if teachers listened to their favorite students, others would lose their attention in learning. She claimed, "Other teachers just listened to some top students and talkative ones. This ultimately hampered silent students like me" (First Int, S1).

From the experiences of participants, it can be said that teachers' practice of favoritism, unfair judgement, biasness, and lack of attention demotivate students. Demotivation can lead to decreased effort, lower performance, and a general sense of apathy towards the activity. When motivation is controlled by any reasons that can result narrow the range of students' efforts to produce targeted outcomes and negative spillover effects on overall learning performance (Deci et al., 2017). Consequently, students will invest little effort towards tasks or behaviour (Howard et al., 2016).

Consequently, demotivation can lead students into a state of apathy, where they lose interest in learning and become disengaged. This often arises from their own past failures or negative experiences, as well as the way they perceive their teacher's treatment. When students feel ignored, misunderstood, or unfairly treated by teachers, their motivation decreases, and they may start doubting their abilities. In contrast, a teacher's role in providing consistent encouragement, constructive feedback, and a

supportive learning environment becomes crucial in minimizing demotivation. By fostering a positive relationship, showing empathy, and recognizing students' efforts, teachers can help reignite students' interest and motivation, ensuring that they stay engaged and confident in their ability to succeed.

Positionality

One of the dimensions of student agency, positionality projects the outcome of the student's interactions with peers and teachers, accessing resources and support during classroom discussion and collaborative work. In positionality, students use their experiences to make sense of new information and to continue new perspectives in class discussions. However, students might use a dispositional agency to tackle a complex task, drawing on the motivational agency to stay engaged and using their positionality to bring diverse perspectives and resources. It is possible to extrapolate information based on the experiences and practices of the participants from the interviews and observations. From the information collected through interviews and observations, three sub-themes emerged. They are Identity and Self-expression, Group Work, Peer Relationship and Collaboration, and Teacher-Student Relationships.

Identity and Self-expression. Students' personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and identities contribute significant perspectives to classroom discussions and activities. Their attitudes, behaviors, and cultural backgrounds are the causes that influence experiences and identities. Their actions and thoughts are shaped by these causes. In one class observation, I found one female student very shy in a discussion related to pornography. When the discussion was going on she said, "Sir stop it, we cannot listen and talk more on it" (Class Obv, 6). The teacher tried to convince her to avoid her hesitation. She responded, "I Could not be open in such a

matter because of our cultural background. Our culture does not digest it" (Class Obv, 6). However, in the same issue, another female student accepted that it could be discussed at home. She agreed, "In this matter, I agree with you sir, we can openly talk about it in an hour at home also. My parents also discuss it with us. So, I do not hesitate" (Class Obv, 6). One of the male students also supported her, "Yes sir, it's nothing big issue. In our level, we must openly discuss any matter like this"(Class Obv, 6). After the discussion, the girl who wanted to avoid the talk due to her cultural barrier accepted that it was not an issue to hide. She said, "Okay sir, it was my weakness. I grew up in the culture. I now understand that I must change my concept" (Class Obv, 6).

In a talk with S1, she agreed that her cultural background has shaped her thoughts and feelings. She shared, "I'm from a very low educational and economic background so that I could not speak anywhere I want. I was taught not to speak with the seniors. Maybe it's my problem caused by our cultural practices" (First Int, S1). However, she started taking the initiative in discussions. She remarked, "After I came to realize the importance of participation in discussion with the support of my teachers, I am now involved in such open discussions" (Sec, Int, S1).

Students' cultural baggage impacts their self-expression in times of need. They could not express what they desired to do. In classroom observations, I found another student often silent. He did not dare to speak on any issue. I inquired. He said, "I cannot speak. It does not mean I do not want to. I asked myself why I cannot speak like others. It must be the effect of my culture. My parents are also like me. They do not speak more" (Class Obv, 5). Another student had similar experiences. She said, "I cannot go against anyone and cannot begin to talk. It is my nature. I can just tolerate it but cannot speak against anyone. I do not know whether it is good or bad. However,

sometimes I feel that I should speak" (Class Obv, 5). Later, after some months, both started taking active part in discussions. In contrast to this, there was another student in the class who always initiated to talk. I asked her why she always wanted to talk in the beginning. She replied, "My parents always guided me to talk in class with teachers. So, I tried. I feel free to put any query in front of positive teachers. Whenever I have confusion, I consult these teachers without hesitation. I get many benefits from positive teachers" (Sec Int, S3).

These examples show that student's experiences and identities are the outcome of their cultural background. As a teacher at a higher level, I have similar experiences. Many students feel hesitant to openly present their ideas or opinions in the classroom due to a fear of judgment or making mistakes. This reluctance often stems from a lack of confidence or previous negative experiences with speaking. As a result, they may exhibit shyness, avoid participation in discussions, and prefer to stay silent rather than risk embarrassment. This reluctance can hinder their learning experience, preventing them from engaging fully and expressing their thoughts freely. I found this is because of their cultural background and attitude towards certain matters such as sexuality and pornography. This type of problem leads them towards silent behavior. Their actions are guided by thoughts, the thoughts are the outcome of experiences, and the experiences are the consequences of their cultural background.

These all contribute to the identity and self-expression of the students which affect their agentic practices inside and beyond the classroom. Their activities and involvement are affected by their identities and expressions. When their identities are marginalized, their agency is limited. Thus, teachers' efforts in changing students' identities and understandings become the landmark for agentic practices.

Teacher-Student Relationships. Positive relationship among teachers and students fosters a supportive environment where students feel empowered to take risks and explore new ideas. Students who experience positive relationships with teachers feel encouraged. S1 shared, "Sure, when teachers are positive, we are encouraged. We can improve by their help and positive attitude. I want to ask for help with whom I have a positive relation. Otherwise, I won't ask for help" (Sec Int, S1). While talking to S5, I found that she was happy to have a good relationship with teachers. The relationship encouraged and raised her confidence. She mirrored:

It affects my personality development. I built the confidence to share him openly and asked him for further guidance. Trust between teachers and me increased. I felt more pleasure when my teacher supported me (laughs). It increased self-confidence. I could again produce more when I was encouraged. This kind of relationship creates another level of a good environment for learning. (Sec Int, S5)

Students expect support, guidance, and feedback from the teachers with whom they have mutual relationships. They feel lucky to have teachers with a supportive nature. S4 experienced a sense of confidence that he would not miss the right track when he got positive feedback and support from teachers. He said, "When I get positive feedback and support, I do not lose the right track in life. I am lucky to have positive teachers" (Sec Int, S4). Where there is a good relationship between teachers and students, the teachers have a chance to recognize students' potential and treat them accordingly. S2 had a similar opinion, "In my experience, the teachers who interacted with me frequently knew my capacity. They guided me individually. It was beneficial for me. It was possible when I had a mutual relationship with my teachers" (First Int, S2).

Teachers' support increases good relationships with students. Students get benefits from the relationship. Good relationships enhance respect and trust towards teachers. When students feel close to teachers, they utilize chances to enhance their potential. S3 said, "I am getting help and encouragement from my teachers, so I am doing good in learning. I feel that I have the power to do something when my teachers know me well. It increases self-respect and self-trust" (First Int, S3). Similarly, S5 accepted that she engaged in activities when her teacher called her name. She had no habit of doing so without indicating her. "Mostly I take part when my teachers call me. I have no habit of doing without telling me" (Sec Int, S5). S1 agreed that she got more achievements through the teacher's relationships. She said, "When I get trust from teachers, I feel that I must do better than this. I feel more excited to get more achievements. This helps to continue my efforts and achievements" (Sec Int, S1). S3 had similar experiences. Due to their close relationship with teachers, she got benefits. She had chances to interact freely. She shared:

I feel free to put any query in front of the teachers who listen to me. Whenever I have confusion, I consult these teachers without hesitation. I get many benefits from a positive relationship with them. I take ideas from them when I get confused in my classroom teaching to my school children. Having their support keeps me confident. However, I cannot talk freely to teachers who are angry and not frank. I have never taken help from them. (Sec Int, S3)

Students reported that they gained support from individuals who were receptive to their voices. It is helpful to boost their confidence and morale. However, students grew negative feelings towards teachers when they could not establish a good relationship. They even did not like to be asked by such teachers. T1 also had

similar experiences when he was free and frank with students they asked him for help, and they liked to do things given by him. But when he showed anger to them, they did not respond to him. He agreed, "Students willingly presented when I remarked their efforts positively. When I supported them with necessary materials and provided them ideas and models, they were ready to present" (First Int, T1). He further added, "I am close to my students because I want to listen to their personal and family problems. When I did this, they kept me close. They freely asked me questions and put problems" (First Int, T1). When teachers keep personal relationships with students, they like to listen to teachers. They pay attention. Whenever they get confused, they can easily interact. T2 expressed, " They were positive to me while I listened to their problems. When they were positive towards teachers they carefully listened, took advantage, and could progress. I have seen their achievements" (First Int, T2). However, the participants of the study have not been benefited from their teachers. Two of the participants experienced that some of their teachers did not have a positive attitude toward students. So, they did not get advantages rather they found their teachers' classes boring and tedious. S3 perceived, "I felt so bored. I started reading watch to count the time. I thought it was a very long class. Friends started talking and making noise. We often go out in their periods" (First Int, S3).

In a cold relationship with students, teachers could not be open towards them. They could not establish a friendly relationship. The students' focus on the presentation was distracted. S4 said, "We do not like to talk to teachers who are not frank towards their students. We hate the teachers' rude behaviors which ultimately keep distance between teachers and students" (First Int, S4). Similarly, S3 put, "I was so depressed finding aggressive teachers in the classroom. I became so sad. My trust

and respect for the teacher decreased" (First Int, S3). In this case, T1 had similar experiences. He mentioned:

Teacher's behaviors affect students' motivation and relationships.

When I did not inspire, motivate, and praise my students, they might not show interest next time. If I showed my anger and aggressiveness, students did not show interest in doing what I gave and did not listen to me. (Sec Int, T1)

Students utilize their relationships with teachers to seek guidance, feedback, and encouragement. Positive relationships can foster a supportive environment where students feel empowered to take risks and explore new ideas. Negative relationships can be harmful to the students. They may cultivate feelings of negativity towards their teachers. S4 experienced similar conditions. He sadly mentioned, "Many times, teachers did not listen to me. I felt harassed. I did not like to listen to the teacher interestingly. It became boring. I expected that the class would end soon. I felt it was a very long and tedious class" (First Int, S4). S1 also had a similar experience. She put, "I did not take part in his class actively. He always showed anger. I wanted to remain silent. Sometimes I did not like to be in his class" (First Int, S1). Instead of the aggressive behavior of teachers, students desire positive attitudes. S5 shared that she wanted tender behavior from her teacher. She said, "When my teachers ask me lovingly without an aggressive tone, I like to present" (Sec Int, S5). Teachers also remarked that students do not like to be reprimanded. They expect loving behaviors from teachers. They like to get positive remarks from their teachers (First Int, T1, and T2).

Students are more likely to present and engage actively when teachers acknowledge and appreciate their efforts. Positive reinforcement from teachers helps

students feel valued, boosting their confidence and willingness to participate. When teachers offer not only encouragement but also the necessary materials, resources, and guidance, students feel better equipped to present their ideas. Similarly, teachers who provide ideas, models, and constructive feedback create a nurturing environment that fosters a sense of readiness in students to showcase their work.

Furthermore, a teacher's positive attitude plays a key role in building strong, trusting relationships with students. When the teachers are approachable and respectful, students feel more comfortable and supported in their learning journey, knowing they are valued partners in the educational process. In contrast, controlling or dismissive attitudes from teachers can stifle student agency, making students hesitant to express themselves or take initiative. From the experiences of all the participants, it is clear that— a teacher's approach—whether encouraging or dismissive— has a profound impact on students' sense of ownership and autonomy in their learning.

A supportive, respectful teacher helps students feel empowered, while a dismissive teacher can undermine their confidence and willingness to act. Students are more engaged at work when they understand the importance of their efforts, take ownership over it, received timely feedback and support, which transform into good performance, strong learning curve and overall adjustment (Deci et al., 2017). This is possible through the positive teacher student relationship which plays a crucial role to seek guidance, feedback, and encouragement for the students.

Group Work, Peer Relationships and Collaboration. Interviews and observations have given me insights that students have willingness to collaborate, help, and work in groups. It's teachers who need to create an environment where students can exercise these. From my observation, I found a collaborative culture

among peers and friends. One of the students said, "I get ideas from friends. Their support helps me in understanding. When I was absent, I could get ideas from them. It was always beneficial" (Class Obv, 11). Mostly students have a helping culture in case of their absence in class. They provide notes and help them to understand the matter when their friends are absent from class. S3 shared, "Every day, they help me. I also help my friends. We exchange notes and ideas with each other. When I was absent, they supported me. She further added, "I got help many times from my friends on the day of my absence. I could learn on the same day in the evening. They shared me and taught me" (First Int, S3). This practice creates an understanding and positive learning environment. This can energize shy and quiet students in the class. In one observation class, I found a student very quiet. I requested her many times to attempt a task. She denied and denied. However, with the push of her friends, she did. The story was:

Friends next to her said, "Go... go try. Sir have requested time and again. You can do it". She still denied it. Another friend said Sir had requested a lot. Do it. You can do that. If I knew it I would do it ("*Sir le yesto request garda ni! garideuna aaihalchha timlai. Mlai aayeta garthe*"). She remained silent. Other students from the next row said, "Go go you can do". After five minutes at the request of six friends, she went to the whiteboard and solved the problem easily. She explained well. One of her friends remarks, "You repeatedly said you could not do it. But you did easily. (Class Obv, 12)

Friends' support and encouragement are greater and powerful than the teachers. In my experience, my single effort did not convince students but the combined effort by her friends made it possible. My reflective note after the class observation said, "Students seemed reluctant to do something in front of the class

although they were capable. When the teacher and their many friends pushed to perform, they did it easily. Friends' effort is stronger than a single teacher" (Class Obv, 11). Another reflective note from a teacher marked similarly, "In the case of the student (S2), I had a bitter experience. I attempted several times in my classes to change her, to make her speak, but I could not succeed. However, due to her friends' influence and request she openly spoke today" (Sec Int, T2). S5 accepted, "My friend's encouragement changed me, I became an active speaker in class due to their influence (First Int, S5). Students experienced that peer support enhanced their ability to do things. They shared content and talked about the issues they were not clear about. S4 pointed out, "Peer support is helpful in enhancing personal capacity and achieving learning goals. I am good in one subject. I can share in this subject. My peer is good in another subject she can help me. It's much fruitful" (First Int, S4). This sharing culture with peers finally helps to improve the learning capacity and confidence of students.

Collaboration is another important phenomenon in the classroom. Collaboration brings ideas together. It helps achieve common goals, fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility. S6 opined, "The main benefit of collaborative learning is getting ideas from friends. I feel easier to keep in mind from the reading with discussion and sharing among friends and teachers (Sec Int, S6). S1 believed, "To foster collaborative learning, teachers need to apply student-centric approaches". She further remarked:

I learn more from friends. I know each other's strengths. Students-centric teaching keeps us active and collaborative. For example, I became lazy in class and did not like to listen to the teacher more when the teacher used the lecture method only. However, I automatically

became active when the teacher used student-centric methods. (Sec Int, S1)

Through student-centric activities, teachers can involve students giving them collaborative tasks. The tasks bring different minds together which is helpful to promote learning capacity. S3 described, "In such collaborative learning, there are different minds involved. Different ideas come. I can choose best ideas among them" (Sec Int, S3). Learning with peers and groups is helpful for students because it is supportive to enhance their ability to complete the given tasks. It is more helpful in doing project work. S5 shared her experience, "When I did project work, I needed the help of friends. This year, in one subject I could not do project work alone. I took the help of my friends. His little guidance helped me complete the project work" (First Int, S5). S6 had similar experiences, "It is very helpful in doing assignments and project works. Once, I rushed with time. They alerted me and provided me with ideas for doing assignments. I almost forgot to do it in time, they reminded me so that I did not lose the position and marks" (First Int, S6). Such collaborative activities enhance learning by allowing students to pool their diverse skills, knowledge, and perspectives, leading to deeper understanding and creativity. S3 shared an example, "Last year, I supported my friends in noticing important issues and questions so that they did well in exams even when they were absent. They had scored good marks in exams (First Int, S3). About collaborative learning, T1 put his experiences, "In collaborative learning, students learn from friends what they cannot learn from teachers. What I find is that those who are not good in subject matter are doing good if they take part in collaborative activities" (Sec Int, T1).

Through collaborative activities, students develop crucial interpersonal skills such as communication, conflict resolution, and teamwork. Additionally,

collaborative learning prepares students for real-world scenarios where teamwork and cooperation are essential for success. S3 believed, "Collaborative activities are helpful in many ways. It ultimately helps to achieve our learning goals" (First Int, S3). In addition to collaboration, group works encourage students to share and do things in time. S5 said, "Yes, I like to do things in a group. We can share with each other" (First Int, S5). Students experienced that learning or doing in a group helps to memorize for longer periods. S6 shared his experience that he could remember the things discussed long ago in the group. His experience was:

I have an interesting incident of group learning. Once I was discussing in the group, one of my friends from the Tamang community told me the answer in her accent. I still remember the answer because of her different accent. It means our mind notices the uniqueness and differences of a friend's responses. So, it is helpful for long-term memory while learning in a group. (First Int, S6)

Students can easily remember while learning in groups as they notice different responses to the same topic or issue. S6 added, "I remember while learning in a group. When my friends said answers in their words, I noticed some differences. It is easier to remember the different ideas for the same topic" (First Int, S6). My reflective note on classroom observation said, "Students shared one another's idea. They learned in the group. All members of the group did not participate in group discussion actively; however, they could answer. It was possible due to their active listening in the group" (RCO, 4). Another reflective note confirmed that students learn more easily without hesitation from their friends than the teachers. Their better performance helped to extend knowledge and skills in the classroom to other students (RCO, 26). S5 was a shy girl. She hesitated to perform something alone. She felt easy to do in a group. She

said, "I am a bit shy student. When the teacher said to do something alone, I could not. When I was asked in group I did" (First Int, S5).

Group work and collaboration in some respects are different though they seem to have many similarities. Group work involves dividing tasks among members, where each person completes their portion independently before combining efforts to finish the project. In contrast, collaboration emphasizes doing together throughout the entire process and engaging in jointly efforts. Collaboration fosters a more integrated and cohesive approach, encouraging mutual support and shared responsibility, whereas group work can sometimes lead to isolated efforts and uneven contribution. Overall, positive peer relationships, group work, and collaboration enhance a student's sense of belonging and willingness to engage. Such engagements foster the student's positionality as an agentic capability.

Conclusively, with the application of these three dimensions of student agency, students enhance their capacity to take meaningful action in their learning. They adopt various contexts and challenges. This overall use of agency dimensions helps them become more effective. They become self-directed learners who can navigate the complexities of their learning environments.

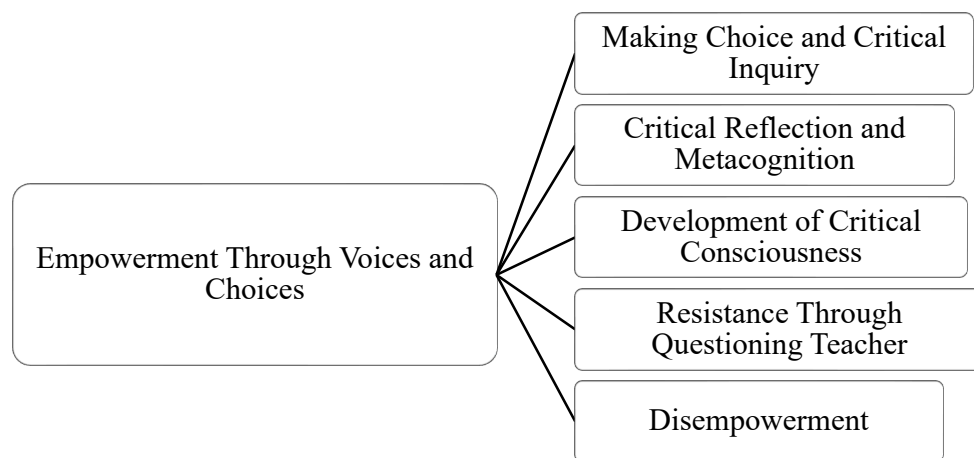
By applying these aspects of student agency—critical reflection, autonomy, and collaboration—students gain the tools to actively engage in their learning journey. As they encounter various contexts and challenges, they learn to adapt, make informed decisions, and take initiative with peers and in groups. This holistic use of agency enables students to become more effective in their learning processes. They face the transition into self-directed learners who not only manage their own educational paths but also develop the resilience and problem-solving skills necessary to navigate

complex learning environments. In doing so, they build the confidence to shape their academic success and personal growth.

Empowerment Through Voices and Choices

To discern the practices of agency for enabling students' critical thinking skills the theme "Empowerment (Disempowerment) Through Voice and Choice" has emerged from the vast array of information collected through observations, reflections, and interactions. For denoting the main theme, sub-themes emerged: Making Choices and Critical Inquiry, Development of Critical Consciousness, Critical Reflection and Metacognition, Resistance Through Questioning Authority. These themes are discussed here with related verbatims.

Figure 6. Concurrent Themes Supporting to the Global Theme: Empowerment Through Voices and Choices



Making Choice and Critical Inquiry

Students may seek to underlie their interest in the classroom through activities and engagements making their own choices. Students like to bring personal and social matters into the classroom. So that they excitedly participate in the interaction. S2 agreed, "Yes, when teachers go with students' personal and social issues, they like to be more interactive" (First Int, S2). When teachers present the personal issues of

students, they become happy. S3 had a similar feeling, "Yes when teachers talked about us, we felt excited. I think that my issues of life also matter in my class. I was happy" (First Int, S3). S5 said, "Personal issues in the classroom help us connect each other. It arouses interest in listening to teachers and others. Social issues help us understand the external world. We can improve our thinking and discussion skills. We can learn to give critical views also" (First Int, S5). Students not only show interest in personal and social issues, but they also demonstrate preferences to the teachers who connect these issues in their content. S3 expressed, "Teacher makes everything interesting. They do not only focus on fixed courses. They can easily connect the course issues to our personal lives and present phenomena. So, the class becomes interesting" (First Int, S3). S2 presented a similar experience, "When our teachers talked about outer issues related to social phenomena, we all listened actively and interacted with teachers more. We all paid attention. But when teachers entered the course, we were less attentive and passive" (First Int, S2).

Students' choices are not limited to listening to the issues of their interest in the classroom. They want to present their own issues of interest. Many students claimed that when they got the topic of their choice, they presented happily. S6 shared his experience, "When I got a topic of my own choice and enough support from teachers, I liked to present. I repeatedly presented" (Sec Int, S6). S4 had a similar thought, "I like to present when I get the topic related to a real-life situation. When I get a chance to choose a topic, I like to present" (Sec Int, S4). While presenting on the topic of their choice, students go deep for the preparation. It helps to improve their learning capacity. Students excel in their capacity through celebrations made in classrooms. They prefer celebration on some specific days. These days, they are free

to express their ideas, thoughts, and creations. S4 mentioned his experiences based on activities:

We celebrated some occasions ourselves in class. Not all teachers but some listened to us and gave us a chance to do what we liked. We celebrated Good Friday, Martyrs Day, and Christmas Day. On that day, we could present our creations. We could share each other's feelings, ideas, and opinions. We promoted our presentation skills and creation habits. For e.g., sometimes we demonstrated interviews in the class. It helped us to conduct interviews for doing research. (First Int, S4)

Students improve speaking skill through small celebrations. They can also improve imagination capacity. They enhance other skills such as listening and writing. Students get a chance to identify their potential from such celebrations. Weak students in learning can also be benefitted. They participate, gain skills enhance confidence. S2 excitedly put:

Yes, we usually have Good Friday celebrations. Every student is happy on that day. We can show our talents, recite poems, and tell stories, and jokes. Weak students in learning also equally take part in the celebration. From these activities, I have improved my presentation skills, increased confidence, and some writing skills. (First Int, S2)

Going with the choices of the students in the classroom they proliferate creativity. Creativity promotes critical inquiry. When students increase their confidence and closeness to teachers, they can question critically. In this aspect S4 regarded, "We learned new vocabulary. We involve in different activities. Our

shyness decreased; confidence increased. We become active and involved. At least, we develop critical inquiries through engagements" (First Int, S4)

From such celebrations in the class, students learn to interact. Their exposure increases. They transfer their knowledge and speaking skill from classroom to the society. The classroom gives the platform to students for their all-round development. They enhance their agency through social exposure. They tend to increase critical inquiry. My observations also show that students who were quiet in class while teaching the course became active and interactive when they were involved in personal and social issues. Every Friday, students requested teachers to celebrate. They believed that if celebrations are made, they become more energetic and happier to be involved. When they were directly involved in the activities their capacity for learning and critical inquiries increased.

I found that students are often dissatisfied with teachers who do not allow them to engage in celebrations or self-managed activities. These events provide students with a sense of ownership and empowerment, giving them the opportunity to showcase their hidden talents and pursue their own interests. When teachers restrict such opportunities, students feel constrained and less motivated to actively participate in the learning process. In contrast, when students are allowed to take charge of classroom events, they experience excitement and pride in organizing and presenting their ideas. This sense of autonomy not only boosts their confidence but also fosters a deeper connection to their learning environment.

Ultimately, such celebrations become a platform for students to express their creativity and individuality, enhancing their overall learning experience with enhancement of speaking and writing skills. They can critically present their ideas

among friends in the classroom. This ultimately enhances their confidence to go with their choices and to present critically beyond the classroom.

Critical Reflection and Metacognition

Through critical reflection, students thoughtfully analyze their learning experiences. They can assess what they have learned, and how they have learned. They also can evaluate the effectiveness of their learning strategies. S6 assessed himself that he could not present in the past because of his shyness and fear. He agreed, "In the beginning, I was afraid and had shyness. I presented with fear in mind. However, I can present easily nowadays. I have avoided hesitation and fear from my presentations" (First Int, S6). From the observations, I found some students having critical reflections on their learning in the past and present. S5 reflected, "Yes, in the past, it was parents' force. I thought I learned for parents. Now I do for myself. I'm the motivator myself. I must do for me now" (First Int, S5). S4 also had a similar reflection, "I take ownership of my learning achievement myself by self-learning, involving in activities, engagements. I was not like that in the past" (First Int, S4). S6 criticized his own past and showed a strong determination, "Yes, I like to be determined now. I need to learn for me. I did not do for me in the past. I am not a teenager now" (First Int, S6). Students' self-realization and criticism help them develop self-awareness in the learning process. They could enhance their ability to learn, comprehend, and analyze. They best utilize their time for learning. Consciousness stems from self-awareness. When students are conscious and aware of their studies, they attain better learning outcomes. This process encourages students to question assumptions, identify areas for improvement, and make informed decisions about their learning paths. These are signs of critical awareness fostered through the practice of their agency.

Conversely, metacognition refers to awareness and regulation of students' own cognitive processes. It facilitates students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own understanding and performance. Metacognitive practices help them learn to set goals, track their progress, and adjust their strategies to optimize learning achievements. Through observations and informal talks, I found that all participants were not aware of metacognitive practices. However, some of them showed their consciousness and experiences with this practice. S4 revealed, "I look back on my own thinking critically. It is needed to change my position and condition in life. I often check myself whether I am doing right or wrong. I critically think what is wrong and right whenever I have a new plan" (Sec Int, S4). Similarly, S6 said, "In later days, I have started looking critically at my own thoughts and progress. It is necessary to change traditional thinking in this age. When I critically think, I get many new ideas and insights which help me achieve and make new plans (Sec Int, S6). However, S3 does not know whether she practices metacognitively. She put, "I have not thought critically upon my thinking. Sometimes, I only rethink to adopt the situation. I do not know whether this is critical thinking or not" (Sec Int, S3). In this regard, teachers were also not clear whether their students practice this. T1 argued, "They do not look at their activities reflectively. They do not try to find out the reasons of unsuccess or weakness. They do not evaluate the process and achievements. Only a few students do this. They are quite successful" (Sec Int, T1). Similarly, S3 agreed:

When I got a chance to put my voice, I did some activities of my interest, and I happily learned. I could express my thoughts and feelings easily. I have a chance of increasing my performance. When I was free to do some activities that I liked I had the chance to present myself. Thus, my performance has increased. (First Int, S3)

Together, critical reflection and metacognition foster a deeper understanding of the learning process, enhance problem-solving skills, and promote lifelong learning by enabling students to take ownership of their educational journey. However, based on my observations, the information shows that students have less practice in critical reflection and metacognition. At the beginning of my observations, I did not find students showing their interest and active involvement in the class. Later, with some attempts to listen to their interest and conduct the activities with their interest, students started showing activeness and involvement in the activities such as student-led interactions, open dialogues, critical reflective debates, etc. This led to the development of students' metacognition and critical reflections.

When students lack critical reflection and metacognitive skills, they face limitations in their ability to assess and evaluate their own learning processes. Without the ability to think critically about their strategies and outcomes, they may struggle to identify areas for improvement, which hinders their capacity to adapt and enhance their approach to learning. This lack of reflection often leads to a stagnant learning experience, where students do not fully understand why certain strategies work or fail, and they may fail to recognize the broader implications of their learning. As a result, their learning achievement is limited, and their sense of agency is weakened, as they are unable to make informed decisions about how to take control of their learning journey. Without the ability to engage in metacognition and reflection, students miss the opportunity to grow not only academically but also personally, limiting their potential for self-directed learning and long-term success.

Development of Critical Consciousness

Developing critical consciousness stems from self-understanding and reflection. It encourages students to question and challenge oppressive structures. The

development of critical consciousness is possible through education and dialogues. Thus, classroom activities, involvements, and interactions are to be enabled to foster critical consciousness among students. My classroom observations showed that students initially did not want to be critical. They had an understanding that being critical meant going against teachers or authorities. I remember one student saying, "Sir, how can we go against teachers? Is it right to go against seniors"? (Class Obv, 12). OT2's continuous efforts made them aware that it was a necessary part of life within and beyond the student's life. Some of them started showing critical responses. Gradually, they developed critical consciousness. S6 showed consciousness, "Yes, it helped. When I was critical, I generated many ideas. I could think differently. New ideas come through criticality. This has obviously increased my creative power" (First Int, S6). S3 still regarded it difficult to talk critically with teachers. However, she could talk with friends. She shared, "Not with teachers but with friends. I debated with my friend's views regarding female teachers. He blamed the female teachers used more mobile in the classroom. I did not accept his views and spoke against it. We had a hot critical debate" (Sec Int, S3). S1 showed a similar belief, "I still find difficulty to interact with many teachers. I could not speak with them critically". She further added, "However, there are few teachers whom I could tell anything freely. I can be close to them. I can share anything I like. But they are very few" (First Int, S1). There are students like S6 who could never tolerate domination either in the classroom or in society. He shared, "Yes, I spoke against domination many times. I was not afraid when I had no mistakes. I raised voices against teachers' domination" (Sec Int, S6).

S4 showed the same nature in the classroom. He claimed that he spoke against domination in society too. He said, "I debated in time of need. I have spoken many times. I do not like domination" (Sec Int, S4). Teachers have experienced that

students are carrying good roles in society who were critically aware in the classroom. T1 argued, "The students who were critical in the classroom are taking good social roles. They are advocating in society. They raise their voices against dominations. But my experience says quiet and passive students in the class are always quiet everywhere" (Sec Int, T1). According to him, every student needs to be critical in class to be critical in social life. He further claimed:

This is a very rare case. Students easily say that they do not understand but they do not give critical arguments. In my class, I find few cases in which students disagree with me and put their arguments critically. It's due to their lack of knowledge and fear. However, I always try to create an environment to is critical. Despite my efforts, I am not satisfied. (Sec Int, T1)

Students saw problems in teachers' presentations. They believed that many teachers did not interact with students, they did not create an interactive environment. So, students lacked the environment to boost their criticality (Obv Cl, 5). S4 believed, "Many teachers did not like to listen to us. They just came in class, gave lectures, and finished their courses. They had no concern for students' choices. How could we improve criticality?" (Sec Int S4). S2 had a similar understanding, "Knowledge of burning social issues helps us expand our horizon of critical thinking. It will finally help to achieve learning goals. But few teachers only involve us in such social interactions. So, it is not possible to boost our critical knowledge" (First Int, S2). Through education and dialogue, people become more critically aware, enabling them to take informed actions toward social change. However, there is no satisfactory situation in the classroom. T1 remarked:

There is a very rare case. Students easily say that they do not understand but they do not give critical arguments. In my class, I find few cases in which students disagree with me and put their arguments critically. It's due to their lack of knowledge and fear. However, I always try to create an environment to be critical. (Sec Int, T1)

With the teacher's efforts, students need to understand the importance of being critical. Otherwise, it is difficult to instill critical awareness among students. From this information and the observations of the classrooms, I understood that students have mixed experiences regarding critical consciousness. Some believed that it was necessary to be critical in the classroom which would be the preparation for social life. However, others believed that being critical was going against teachers or authority that was not considered ethical for them. Beyond this thinking, it is true that the development of critical awareness is possible in the classroom. Teachers are consciously taking it as an important aspect; however, they did not show satisfactory experiences on this. They used different strategies such as open discussions, debates, critical discussions, democratic classroom practices, etc. to develop critical consciousness as the process of preparing for the social life of students, but they found it difficult.

In my observation, OT1 tried conducting debates and open discussions. Students took part in open discussions but very few students (just three) took part in debates. He tried it for three days but just three students were ready. In my own experience, I failed many times to instill critical awareness among students who often think being critical is going against teachers and friends.

The process of fostering critical thinking skills not only empowers individuals but also contributes to collective agency and societal transformation. When

individuals learn to think critically, they can challenge the status quo, identify systemic issues, and propose innovative solutions. This, in turn, encourages a more active, informed, and engaged citizenry, driving social progress and positive change. However, the challenges you faced in fostering a positive attitude toward being critical are not uncommon. Many students or individuals may resist or feel uncomfortable with critical thinking because it can challenge deeply held beliefs, authority, and traditional norms.

Resistance Through Questioning Teacher

In my observations, I found rare practices of questioning teachers against their authoritative behaviors in the beginning. Students had very rare attempts of resistance. In one situation, S1 felt so depressed due to the teacher's role but she could not resist. She just accepted unwillingly. She shared, "I became so sad and depressed when our teacher agreed on the wrong answer of talented students, but they did not agree on my answer which was correct (in multiple-choice item). See! What happened at that moment to me?" (First Int, S1). Students knew that their teachers discriminated against them, but they did not resist. S3 had a similar experience. Due to the teacher's preferences of two students in her class, she was resentful but could not resist. Her story was: "Some teacher made us sad in class. It's because they only took a few students' names in the class frequently. The teachers often called the names of one or two talented students. I felt jealous and sad but could say nothing" (First Int, S3).

In my observations, I found that both teachers repeatedly called only a handful of students' names. In some situations, students wanted to put their voices against bias, but teachers did not consider it. Students in interviews share similar experiences that I found in observations. S1 shared, "I have many experiences regarding this. When I responded to teachers' questions, they did not fully support my response. The

teachers did not agree fully on our correct answers. We became dumb. When I spoke against the biases, he did not listen" (First Int, S1). However, in this regard, teachers did not accept that their students directly resisted. T1 said. "This is a very rare case. Students easily say that they do not understand but they do not give critical arguments. In my class, I find very few cases in which students disagree with me and put their arguments critically" (Sec Int, T1).

Teachers assumed that students' fear and lack of knowledge stopped them from being resistant. However, I did not find this reason for every student. Knowledgeable and bold students also could not go against teachers' injustice. In some cases, the student's belief system made them resistant. However, with critical awareness created in the classroom during observation classes, some students could indirectly go against the authoritative and discriminatory behaviors of teachers. In this scenario, S1 changed her mind and could post her feelings on social media. This is a kind of resistance. She shared:

I usually wrote my feelings when I choked. Many times, I wanted to post on Facebook, but I could not. I thought that the teachers would be angry. Most of the time, I kept the feeling unpublished and inside me because of fear. I had a lot of fear in the first posting. But I posted.

(First Int, S1)

After posting on her Facebook, she was happy to resist indirectly. She thought that her teachers might have seen the post. Then after her friends' encouragement, she avoided fear. She knew that it was necessary to resist directly. She said, "I had a little fear but later I avoided it. I felt happy. I thought that those teachers might have seen it. I guessed those teachers would tell me something reacting to my post, but they did not" (First Int, S1). T1 also believed that students did not directly resist teachers. They

either used social media or told another teacher. He expressed, "They do not directly tell me. However, they tell me about other teachers' injustice practices. I learn from that. Maybe they are talking about me also with other teachers. It is indirect resistance. They still have problems resisting directly" (First Int, T1).

Although all teachers did not aware students of the importance of resistance, some students' concepts had been changed by the little effort in my observational classes. S2 was another example that had been changed. She agreed, "I had a very fearful relationship with teachers at the beginning. I did not know why this happened. It continued till the college level. I could not question to teachers. But now you have changed my concept. I can resist" (First Int, S2). Slowly, the scenario of the classroom changed. Students started questioning teachers. My reflective observation note said, "Students questioned the teacher about his work. Students did not readily accept what the teacher told them to do things. It happened after my suggestions to students to be critical and ask questions when they want. When there was peer or friend's request, they were ready to do" (RCO, 17). This form of resistance encourages a dynamic learning environment where dialogue and debate are valued over passive acceptance. Students started debating on the contents presented by the teachers. Another reflective note showed, "Students are critical about their reading. They questioned the system of offering jobs in markets. They also supported the hard work. They were offensive to the recruiting system of the country. They critically questioned and looked at the issues" (RCO, 19). This kind of critical debate helps shape the agency of students in a meaningful learning environment.

In observations, I saw some students directly resisting teachers in the classroom. They boldly put their arguments and opposition. S6 put, "I don't think I challenge but when I do not agree with them, I directly can oppose" (First Int, S6). He

added, "Yes, I spoke against domination many times. I am not afraid when I have no mistakes. I raised voices against teachers' domination" (Sec Int, S6). S4 also had a similar nature. He could speak. He claimed, "I debate in time of need. I have spoken many times. I do not like domination. I can resist timely" (Sec Int, S4). When the classroom is flexible and dynamic, students can resist in time. A reflective note shared, "Weak students in the class raised questions, pointed out teacher's mistakes when they found the class open and flexible" (RCO, 15). When students are aware, they resist teachers directly without delay. Another note said, "Despite the persistent effort of the teacher, sometimes students did not follow or accept the teacher's advice when they did not agree with the teacher" (RCO, 21). Another note reflected, "Students questioned the teacher about his work. Students did not readily accept what the teacher told them to do things. It happened after my suggestions to students to be critical and ask questions when they want" (RCO, 17). Students resist in the form of satire when the context is given by the teacher through literary text. Once he was teaching a poem and showing the satire to leaders. One of the students made a satire to the teachers. My reflective note said, "Students expressed their voice when they found proper contexts. It was a good context to satire their teachers through the explanation of literary text. Students used the literary texts as an open access to show the resistance" (RCO, 18). Resistance through questioning authority is a powerful form of dissent that challenges established norms and power structures. However, T2 did not regard student resistance positively. He said, "Resistance in the classroom does not yield a positive atmosphere" (First Int, T2). He believed questioning every time in class may dismiss positive relations between teachers and students.

By asking critical questions, individuals can expose inconsistencies, injustices, and abuses of power, prompting reflections and change. This practice fosters a culture

of accountability and transparency, encouraging leaders and teachers to justify their actions and intention (Engestrom, 2000). It empowers students to think independently, recognize their own agency, and collectively push for a more just and equitable society. In the beginning, student questions to the existing order and logic of their activity then queries are made collectively (Engestrom, 2014). Students begin developing critical thinking skills by first challenging assumptions and questioning the status quo, which encourages them to think beyond surface-level information. In the classroom, they learn to question not just what is being taught, but also the underlying beliefs and frameworks that shape knowledge.

The classroom, therefore, becomes a critical space for exercising resistance. It's not only a place for absorbing information but also for challenging and rethinking the information being presented. By questioning teachers, authorities, and established norms, students develop a sense of autonomy and a critical lens through which they can navigate the world. This resistance is not about defiance for its own sake but about cultivating the skills to engage in thoughtful critique and actively shape their own learning process.

Disempowerment

Students shared that they found some teachers demotivating because they use traditional approaches to teaching. They do not show interest in all students. They do not equally treat students. Within these contexts, S3 shared, "I felt so bored. His teaching style was so boring. There was no two-way communication" (First Int, S3). It happens when the teachers do not listen to their students' choices and interests. S1 shared her sad experience. Her teacher did not know her name for four years of teaching. She commended:

There are many teachers who do not like to listen to every student. They do not pay attention to all of us. They only consider some talkative and talented students in the class. They only take their names, listen to them, and respond to them. There are teachers who never paid attention to me. They taught me for three/four years, but they don't openly talk to me calling my name. (First Int, S1)

Self-determination theory argues that actions or events that are perceived to negatively affect student's experience of competence which leads to demotivation (Ryan & Patrick, 2009). One of causes of demotivation is to dishonor students' interest in the classrooms. When teachers do not pay attention to students' choices, students do not prefer the teachers. S4 said, ". . . some teachers did not like this. They just came in class, gave lectures, and finished their courses. They had no concern to students' choices. We felt bored" (First Int, S4). S1 shared similar experience, "I have some depressing moments in classrooms. When I answered to the teachers, they never showed satisfaction.... So, my energy decreased" (First Int, S1). Students found teachers' discriminatory behaviors while giving chances for presentation and assigning marks to the students' works. S4 shared evidence, "I have some evidence. Once my teacher gave different marks to me and my friend. We had written same.... It was discrimination in giving marks" (First Int, S4). S5 had a similar experience, ". . . they only checked homework of talented students. They did not like to see our writings. They did not ask whether we had written or not. So, I do not like to do homework" (First Int, S5). In my observations initially, I noticed similar things. Teachers checked only few students' homework. S4 had a similar expression, "Some teachers have students of their choices" (First Int, S4). Because of teacher's discrimination, S6 expressed her feeling, "I felt bad when my teachers checked and

concerned to only talented students in the class. It is a kind of discrimination. I liked to drop out the class" (First Int, S6). He added that when her teachers did not call her names, she did not like to participate in activities and interactions.

The factor contributing to disempowerment is the lack of a supportive and inclusive learning environment. When students do not feel heard or valued, their sense of agency can diminish. S3 showed depression because of lack of inclusive nature of teacher. She expressed, "I was so depressed finding such teachers in classroom. I became so sad. My trust and respect to the teacher decreased" (First Int, S3). S2 had a little different experience of being demotivated. She revealed that her friends were afraid to talk to teachers because they feared of being judged by them. She said, "I find them silent may be its their weakness. They do not like to expose. They shared me that they were afraid of being judged by the teachers" (First Int, S2). In this regard, teachers also believed that they have the major role to motivate or demotivate students. However, in my class observations, I found mostly teachers did not pay attention to all students equally. T1 accepted:

Teacher's behaviors affect students' motivation. When I do not inspire, motivate, and praise my students, they do not show interest next time. When I scold, blame and remark negatively they do not attempt next time. If I show my anger and aggressiveness, students do not show interest in doing what I give and do not listen to me. (Sec Int, T1)

He accepted that when teachers did not listen students they stopped asking. He said, "It surely happens. If I do not listen and answer them in time, they will be frustrated. They will stop asking" (First Int, T1). Both T1 and T2 regarded the importance of motivation in classroom, however, they accepted that they had not satisfactory experiences implementing motivational strategies in classrooms.

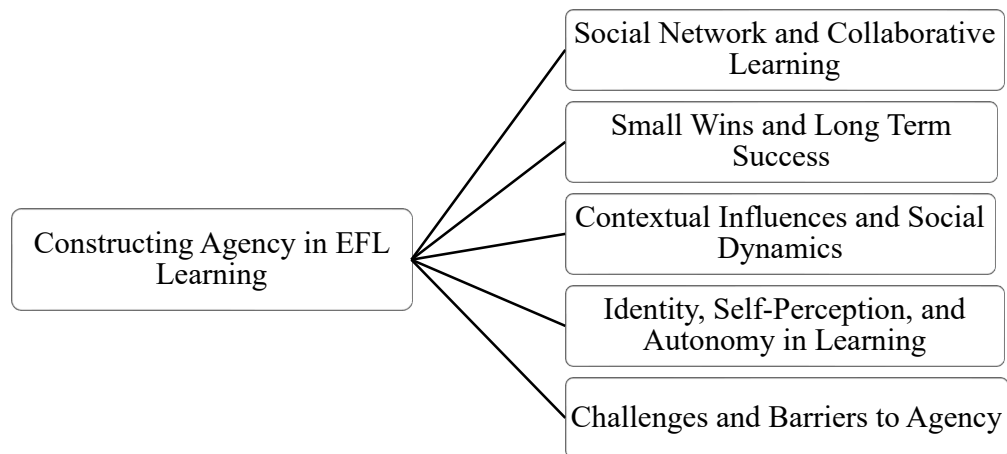
In such contexts, teachers have a decisive role to determine what to teach, how to teach, and how to approach students. If teachers do not consider these aspects from the point of view of students, this results students' passivity, and demotivation in learning process. Thus, it is necessary to ensure that all students have voices and choices to feel them empowered fostering a sense of ownership and responsibilities in their learning.

Students can spill over themselves through their choices and interest. They slowly avoid their misunderstandings. This leads towards mutual relationship among stake holders of the classroom. This relationship helps the teachers to promote encouragement to their students so that empowerment is at hand. Students do not experience disempowerment.

Constructing Agency in EFL Learning

This theme captures how students in EFL classrooms navigate and make sense of their educational experiences by using personal motivation, social identities, classroom environments. This also includes resilience, feedback, and achievements. The theme highlights the holistic and dynamic nature of agency where backgrounds, goals, and interactions of individual student shape their sense of control within learning context. It is a collective approach to make sense of their agency. This global theme consumes other sub-themes. They are: Social Networks and Collaborative Learning, Small Wins and Long-Term Success, Contextual Influences and Social Dynamics, Challenges and Barriers to Agency, and Identity, Self-Perception, and Autonomy in Learning.

Figure 7. The Concurrent Themes Supporting to the Global Theme: Constructing Agency in EFL Learning



Social Network and Collaborative Learning

Social networking and collaborative learning foster peer interaction and knowledge sharing. Social networks facilitate students to connect, communicate, and collaborate beyond the classroom. It enriches their learning experiences through diverse perspectives and real-time feedback. On the other hand, collaborative learning enhances active learning, engagement, and critical thinking which are facilitated by these networks. Utilizing the networks students develop social skills to solve problems, complete assignments and achieve common goals. This interconnected approach builds a supportive community of learning. To talk about collaborative learning, there are several benefits of it. S5 put, "I can learn from friends. We know each other's strengths. Collaborative teaching keeps us active. I became lazy in class. I did not like to listen, teacher. When the teacher used collaborative methods, I automatically became active" (Sec Int, S5). Similarly, S6 claimed, "The main benefit of collaborative learning is getting ideas from friends and teachers. I feel easier to keep in mind from reading with discussion and sharing among friends and teachers.

Sharing ideas help shape our language skills" (Sec Int, S6). Collaborative methods keep students active. They get different ideas of learning and various thoughts on content. S3 shared her experience:

In collaborative learning, there are different minds involved. Different ideas come. I can choose the best ideas among them. We four friends learn together. We all come up with our own ideas which are helpful to expand our knowledge level. Weak students get benefits from collaborative learning. They can easily learn from their friends who are from the same level. (Sec Int, S3)

It is difficult for a teacher to manage every content easier for different levels of students. However, if they adopt a collaborative learning approach, it is beneficial to weak students also. The weak students get ideas from their friends. In this regard, T1 shared his experiences:

In collaborative learning, students learn from friends what they cannot learn from teachers. They can share things with their friends which they cannot do with teachers. In student-centric activities also all students do not take part. I need to make extra efforts to engage them. What I find is that those who are not good at subject matter are doing well if they take part in activities. (Sec Int, T1)

In addition to these, collaborative learning provides practical skills to students. They build up communication skills, networking skills, presentation skills, and group work skills when teachers use student-centric approaches for collaborative learning. S4 believed, "From student-centric teaching, we get practical knowledge. We improve our habit of searching for ourselves and working together. In collaborative learning, we can share ideas and thoughts. We gain different practical skills like

communication skills" (Sec Int, S4). Gaining skills from different activities means students are utilizing their agency. To strengthen their agentic practices, social networking additionally helps to expand and facilitate collaborative learning. Collective agency is exercised in collaborating with friends and peers (Oshana, 2005).

Furthermore, social networks offer vast opportunities to enhance their personal and academic agency. By influencing the platforms, students can develop their skills, expand their knowledge, and build valuable connections. There are several ways students can utilize social networks to enhance their agency. They can use family, friends, chatgroups, society etc. as the platform to enrich their learning contexts. In this aspect, S3 shared, "Getting support from my father, family, sisters and largely from teacher, I am doing good. I get ideas from them when I feel difficult" (First Int, S3). S4 had different understandings. He claimed, "I became aware for learning from friends, teachers and seniors. It increased consciousness in studies. I learnt from the stories of seniors which I listened. So, I wanted to keep a network with them" (First Int, S4). Keeping networks and utilizing these for personal and academic enrichment is a good way to develop agency. S6 shared that he utilized messenger groups to share ideas preparing for exams. He gathered friends in his home to discuss about the difficult contents. He shared, "I can get ideas from friends. Their support helps me in understanding. When I am absent, I can get ideas from them through messenger group. I called my friends at my home to discuss difficult subject last year in exam time" (First Int, S6). In similar vein, S3 utilized her friend's group and family. She said, "I have got full support from my family and friends. Society has taken me as a model. They remarked that I have made remarkable progress in this age. I have used friends many times in my academic and personal development" (Sec Int, S3). S2 shared that she used WhatsApp and messengers to speak English with friends. She

said, "When I called my friends in Messenger or WhatsApp group, we spoke English. It was awesome! We improved our speaking skills" (Sec Int, S2). S5 had a different experience. She could not utilize networks well. She accepted that it was her weakness. She said, "No, my family members are not educated. They cannot support in my study. I have no good friends to support me. I am not close to teachers. I am shy. I do things alone. It's my weakness" (First Int, S5).

By effectively utilizing social networks and collaborative learning strategies, students can enhance their agency in various aspects of their lives. They can use these platforms to access resources, communities, and opportunities to add their academic success and personal development. From the information, it is true that all students have not utilized the platform fully. The students who have used these are happy. They enhance their agency. It is important aspect of agency that students need to use these tools mindfully focusing on building meaningful connections and engaging with content that support their academic goals and overall personal development.

In essence, social networks and collaborative learning environments offer students an opportunity to engage in authentic, meaningful contexts where they can practice English. These platforms allow for real-time interaction and peer-to-peer exchange, helping students improve their language skills through conversation, feedback, and collaborative tasks. As students work together, they not only enhance their linguistic abilities but also reinforce their sense of agency. By taking ownership of their learning, setting goals, and actively contributing to group discussions, students feel empowered to shape their learning experiences. This collaborative process strengthens their confidence and self-efficacy, allowing them to take initiative and approach language learning with greater autonomy. Through these interactions,

students become more aware of how their efforts and contributions directly influence their learning outcomes.

Small Wins and Long-Term Success

Celebrating small achievements builds confidence and motivation to tackle more significant challenges. Students' small achievements are the crucial steps that occur along the journey towards long-term goals. They play a significant role in maintaining motivation and providing a sense of success. In my observations and interviews, I noticed that students wanted small wins. It is human nature to be happy with achievements. The achievements give the students a sense of success to move ahead and gain long-term achievements. S6 had a similar sense, "In times of small achievements, I feel happy. I like to see other friends' success in such small achievements. These small achievements give us the foundations for long-term goals" (Sec Int, S6). Similarly, S4 took small achievements as the basis of confidence for further success. He said, "Small achievements bring happiness. I feel more responsible after one achievement. I feel that I must do many things better. Small achievements provide confidence for setting long-term goals and achievements" (Sec Int, S4). Compliments in small achievements by teachers and parents make students more delighted and determined to perform better next time. It also arouses their morale of them. S5 said, "These things make many differences. Small wins but have deep effects. I get relief when my teachers compliment me on my achievements. It boosts my morale to do more" (Sec Int, S5). S2 had a similar experience. Her parents motivated her to celebrate her achievements. She shared, ". . . In my case, my mother and father both always support me. They often celebrate my small achievements. I came first in three internal exams last year; my parents celebrated the results days. It encouraged me to do better in final exams" (First Int, S2). Small achievements

promote students' motivation for further steps. When they succeed in a task, they are excited to set another target. Thus, it becomes a foundation for paving the way forward to long-term success.

S3 shared, "Small achievements make the basis for long-term goals. When I was happy with a small achievement, I was motivated to set up a long-term goal" (Sec Int, S3). She further added, "When I passed the primary teacher's exam, from this achievement, I have set the long-term goal to be a permanent secondary teacher" (Sec Int, S3). S1 and S5 had the same targets as S3. S1 said, "I did not expect that I would pass the permanent teacher examination. When I got compliments from others, I determined that I should pass secondary level anyway" (Sec Int, S1). In this respect, T1 added, " When teachers celebrate students' achievements, they get motivated. These small achievements become the foundation of long-term goals and achievements. If students are not making small achievements, they are being demotivated". (Sec Int, T1)

With complements of teachers and parents or any other person in students' small wins, they feel more responsibility for future endeavors. S3 showed a similar attitude, "I see my achievement history of previous years. Looking at my past achievement of class 11 and 12, from this I felt, I could do better in Bachelor" (First Int, S3). This evidence shows the significant connection between small achievements and long-term success. Their relationship is synergetic. Small achievements act as building blocks for reaching long-term goals. Long-term goals provide a framework for small achievements through context and significance. Achieving long-term goals, such as passing the Teacher Service Commission exam or using English in real-world situations, validates their efforts and reinforces their sense of agency. It is necessary

to review both small achievements and long-term goals regularly to ensure alignment and make necessary adjustments.

However, the participants are not fully conscious about it. Students often overlook the importance of small wins as steppingstones to long-term success. Teachers play a crucial role in helping them understand how incremental progress and consistent efforts build momentum toward achieving larger goals. By emphasizing the value of small achievements, teachers can foster a growth mindset and encourage perseverance, showing students that success is a cumulative process.

Contextual Influences and Social Dynamics

To construct students' identities social dynamics, and educational contexts influence them. It helps to develop a sense of autonomy, and self-engagement in learning. By directing these complex phenomena, students learn to affirm their agency. S2 opined, "Understanding social issues is needed. My friends are also excited to discuss our social issues. It will be helpful for us to deal with social difficulties. We must have more social ideas than bookish knowledge to fit in social life" (First Int, S2). Students want the knowledge to fit in their practical social life from classroom interactions. They want to connect the knowledge to their daily life. S6 shared, "Yes, we need this. I want to gain practical knowledge from the classroom which will fit society" (First Int, S6). The knowledge students acquire in the classroom can be used in their professional lives. S4 has been doing this. He said, "Yes, I am using my classroom knowledge in my teaching career. I also use it in my family and society" (Sec Int, S4).

Classroom culture and collaboration with teachers and friends have contextual influence in exercising agency. Teachers can create learning spaces in the classroom to prepare for their social life. T1 highlighted his ideas:

. . I create learning spaces. I let them speak write or listen according to their potential. I suggest and motivate them to find good things for them. For listening, I give listening tests, audio, videos, or similar materials. In writing, I suggest writing on their interest-looking archives. In speaking, I assign them to tell the summary of different texts. These all skills preparation in class with practical activities will be helpful in their future teaching career. In this way, we can connect the classroom to students' social life. (First Int, T1)

The participants believe that exercising social context in the classroom is necessary for their future careers. It is not easy every time to create a social context in the classroom. However, teachers can use this platform as a basis for activating students to prepare for their future lives. Students can enhance their potential by being proactive in the classroom when teachers create different social contexts in the classrooms.

A teacher's willingness to contextualize the classroom issues plays a pivotal role in making learning more meaningful and relevant to students. When the teachers recognize the importance of integrating real-life, student-centered issues into their teaching, they create a dynamic learning environment that resonates with learners' lived experiences. By addressing topics that are personally and socially significant to students, teachers foster deeper engagement, critical thinking, and emotional connection to learning.

Such contextualized learning settings allow students to develop problem-solving skills, ethical reasoning, and a sense of agency in addressing societal challenges. Moreover, when students see their concerns and realities reflected in classroom discussions, they feel valued and empowered, which enhances their

confidence and participation. These meaningful interactions not only prepare students academically but also equip them with essential life skills such as adaptability, communication, and social responsibility. Ultimately, teachers who embrace this approach contribute to shaping individuals who are more prepared to navigate and contribute to their broader social and professional lives.

Identity, Self-Perception, and Autonomy in Learning

Identity gives students a sense to see themselves on their journey of education. Self-perception impacts their beliefs about their own abilities and potential to empower progress. Autonomy encourages learners to take initiative and make informed decisions about their learning goals. These features create a dynamic and personalized learning experience for students enhancing resilience and lifelong learning.

Identity. In observation classes, I found students aware of their identities. They wanted to show themselves as well as they could. Few students did not like to exhibit, they remained silence. Their different identities have influenced their learning approach. S6 had the feeling that when the teachers did not call his name, he had no value in class. He wanted to be identified by his name. He expressed, "When teachers do not call names and let us interact in mass, I do not like to discuss . . . Half of the friends do not interact. I like to be called by name. At that time, I feel my presence" (First Int, S6). For some students, their name is their identity while for others their autonomy is their identity. S2 claimed, "I like to be independent. This is my identity. It helps to promote my self-learning and confidence. I have my approach to learning" (Sec Int, S2). Identity shapes their learning approaches. S6 felt similar, "Looking at my personality, my friends and teachers are helping me. They are also expecting differences from me. This has influenced my approach into learning. . . . I am under

pressure of their expectations to keep my identity" (Sec Int, S6). Identity creates a kind of pressure so that students like to perform. S1 shared that she had different identities. It's challenging to keep balance among these, but she is determined to her goal. She accepted, "I am a female. I must play the role of a mother and housewife at home and as a teacher at school. I am a student on campus. So, I must listen to all their expectations. I try to do it accordingly. I am committed to my goals also" (Sec Int, S1). For some students, multiple identities create pressure to promote their potential in learning. However, some students see their identity through the eyes of teachers. They think that their teachers perceive them differently. They find the contrast in the perception of the teachers. S1 expressed that her teachers found her silent which they consider negatively. She said, "In the classroom, I remained silent, teachers perceived me as a weak student. A teacher said, "How can you do good remaining silent? You must speak." When I did not speak, he perceived me as weak.... So, personal identity matters to the teachers" (Sec Int, S1).

Identity matters in promoting the potential of individual students. Their strong belief in their identity creates confidence and creativity. However, their weak perception of their own identity makes them weaker in confidentiality. A firm belief in their own identity fosters resilience, enabling them to navigate academic and personal challenges with confidence. It also nurtures creativity, as students feel empowered to express their unique perspectives and ideas without fear of judgment.

Conversely, a weak or uncertain sense of identity can hinder a student's ability to engage fully in learning. When students struggle with self-perception, they may experience self-doubt, reluctance to participate, and fear of failure. This lack of confidence can lead to disengagement, limiting their willingness to take academic risks or explore new ideas. Additionally, weak identity perception can impact their

ability to communicate effectively, collaborate with peers, and assert their viewpoints, further restricting their potential.

Therefore, fostering a positive and secure sense of identity in students is essential for building their confidence, creativity, and overall academic and personal growth. Teachers and educators can support this by creating inclusive, affirming learning environments where diverse identities are acknowledged, respected, and celebrated.

Self-Perception. Self-perception of students influences their belief system on their capacity and potential. It has a significant impact on empowering the agency of the students. It is important to note how they see the things that happen in the classroom and beyond and in what ways their self-perceptions affect their confidence and motivation in learning. S1 had a belief that when she was trusted by her teachers, she had a feeling of obligation to do better. She said, "When I get trusted by teachers, I feel that I must do better than this. I feel more excited to get more achievements. This helps to continue my efforts and achievements. I should maintain this trust" (Sec Int, S1). Similarly, S3 had the belief that she could not present well. She did not have the courage to present. When the teacher trusted her capacity and encouraged her, she attempted and did well. She shared, "... My teachers trusted me and convinced me to do it. They said, "Manju (pseudo name) you can do. You can do". When I accomplished the task, I became happy. This gave me the courage to do more" (Sec Int, S3). This shows that student's self-perception about themselves and belief in their own capacity may affect their agency. When they find the situation and encouragement from the teachers, they can do well.

Teachers' role in changing students' perception of their own capacity becomes an important aspect of changing their concepts. It is necessary to give them situations

or activities to change their belief. T1 believed that he had changed many students' perceptions letting them practice. He said, "Initially students did not want to do it. They believed that they had no capacity to perform. When I created the situation, they performed well. So, it is necessary to change their belief that they are weak" (First Int, T1). He further remarked:

Yes, many students have changed. In the beginning, they did not want to tell their creation. After free practices and some attempts, they can present in front of the class and in events in outdoor programs without hesitation. It is helpful to find out the capacity of the students. (First Int, T1)

My observations a had similar evidence. In one class, OT2 introduced the concept of Buddhism and nirvana. However, none of the students accepted the concept. The following day, the teacher revisited the topic, presenting it in a more detailed and elaborate manner, drawing comparisons with other religious beliefs. This time, the students were more receptive and accepted the concept. This demonstrates that changing an individual's perception is not always an easy task and often requires persistence and a thoughtful approach. Students carry this belief system from their understanding. Their beliefs sometimes hinder developing their capacity. They lose confidence. S1 experienced a similar situation, "In many things, I cannot motivate myself. There is an effect of my belief I felt that my family background never allowed me to study and have external exposure. I believed as an inferior so I could not develop confidence" (Sec Int, S1). However, S6 had a different experience. He claimed that his belief is strong and positive so he could raise his confidence. He said, "My self-perception says that I must be self-motivated. My belief in any issue pursues my understanding so that my confidence is related to my belief" (Sec Int, S6).

Similarly, S2 took herself as a positive motivator because of her perception to see things. She claimed, "My mind is open. Everything is open to me. So, my perception is always positive. I am always positively guided. I have confidence in doing things" (Sec Int, S2). This information underscores the profound influence that belief systems have on students' confidence, motivation, and overall learning experiences. A student's belief system, shaped by prior knowledge, cultural background, personal experiences, and social interactions, serves as a foundation for how they perceive challenges and opportunities in their academic journey. When students hold strong and well-founded beliefs about their abilities and the value of learning, they are more likely to engage actively in classroom discussions, take risks in expressing their thoughts, and persist through difficulties.

These positive beliefs foster a growth mindset, encouraging students to see mistakes as learning opportunities rather than failures. However, deeply ingrained beliefs can also act as barriers, making it challenging for them to accept alternative perspectives or engage with new concepts. Such resistance can hinder their motivation to explore, question, and grow, emphasizing the need for educators to approach these belief systems with sensitivity, fostering an environment of respectful dialogue and gradual transformation.

Autonomy. Autonomy in learning refers to being able to make decisions, express opinions freely and accepting responsibilities for one's action (Cook & Artino Jr, 2016). It is like the experience of learners when they feel free to set learning goals and monitor their own progress in attaining the achievements. In autonomy, they are free to set strategies to overcome challenges in independent learning. Autonomous students try to maintain balance between their self-learning and seeking support from others. The autonomy helps to sustain long term achievements endorsing actions

towards highest level of reflection (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Howard et al., 2016). So, it benefits students to go for long-term academic achievements. S6 regarded, "Yes, I am active. I trust myself fully. So, I take initiative myself. I do not wait for others' commands. I have a dream to go higher so I cannot wait for others' influence" (Sec Int, S6). He was determined to keep autonomy for long-term achievement. S4 saw the importance of the classroom environment for learners' autonomy. He believed, "Ourteacher has given fully friendly environment for presentation. They equally give the chances. This is necessary for our autonomy. But all teachers do not do this" (Sec Int, S4). Similarly, for S5 autonomy is necessary to have choices of contents which reinforces them to learn with personal interest. She said, "When I have a chance to decide myself, I put more interest in learning" (First Int, S5). S3 had the opinion that she gave continuous efforts to learning without other's influence to do better in exams. She said, "I realize that if I do not read more, I will fail in exam. So, I cannot quit. I give continuous efforts myself. I do not wait for other's influence" (Sec Int, S3).

Presentation by students is a major part of classroom activities in higher education. Students like to present when they are free to choose the issue of their presentation. Teachers need to consider this aspect. S6 and S4 shared their experiences that they presented many times because they got freedom of choice to their topics. S6 expressed, "When I got a topic of my own choice and enough support from teachers I liked to present. I repeatedly present" (Sec Int, S6). Similarly, S4 said, "I like to present when I get a topic related to a real-life situation. When I get a chance to choose a topic, I like to present" (Sec Int, S4). He further added that the practice of autonomy helps learners to prepare for further steps. He said, "Yes. It will surely help. I can use the things I have. If I am fully prepared now, I shall enhance my further studies. Preparing now means getting the necessary changes to empower myself. It's

my responsibility" (First Int, S4). S6 claimed that he exercised his autonomy in setting long-term goals. He said, "I set my learning goal myself. In the past parents did. Now, I have my autonomy"(First Int, S6). In a similar vein, S1 shared: "I think I am proactive. I believe in myself and want to do things on time. I always keep myself busy. It's for my career." (Sec Int, S1). Students' practice of autonomy enhances their ability to advance learning strategies, setting goals, and monitoring their progress.

Since autonomy is an internal state students can reflect the integrated endorsement and organization of their activities supportive to autonomy (Ryan & Patrick, 2009). Students who exercise their autonomy are found active, energetic, and self-engaged. They prioritize their responsibilities and keep balance between seeking helps and doing things themselves. By navigating these complex influences, students learn to assert their agency, make informed choices, and contribute meaningfully to their educational journeys.

Additionally, students make sense of their lived agentic experiences by combining their own motivations, identities, classroom interactions, resilience, teachers and peer feedbacks, and overall achievements. These elements combine to form a dynamic and individualized understanding of their journey in learning, empowering them to take control of their further educational and other personal opportunities.

Finally, resilience enables them to overcome challenges and persist in their educational pursuits. Teachers' and peers' feedbacks provide constructive insights, helping students reflect on their strengths and areas for improvement. Moreover, their overall achievements, whether academic or personal, reinforce their sense of agency and competence. Together, these elements form a dynamic and evolving understanding of their learning experiences, empowering students to take control of

their learning and make informed decisions about their future academic and personal opportunities.

Challenges and Barriers to Agency

Social expectations, cultural values, gender bias, and socioeconomic status can limit opportunities and discourage autonomy. Besides, lack of knowledge in the key areas, low self-esteem, fear of failure, and fixed mindset can hinder the ability to make informed decisions and take effective action. Ultimately, unstable, or unsuitable environments, institutional biases, and inequalities can restrict access to opportunities and necessary supports. Because of injustice, S5 showed apathy in learning. She shared her experience, "It became a sad moment for me. I never preferred injustice. Teachers only taught about justice and equality. However, they did the opposite to it in classrooms. This disappointed and demotivated in learning" (First Int, S5). Similarly, S6 claimed, "Teachers' injustice is very disgraceful which kills learners desire and aspirations" (First Int, S6). When teachers do not equally treat and pay attention to all students, the students do not put interest in their classes. They fall into the path of apathy in learning. Finally, it impacts their achievements. In this regard, S1 had a similar experience, ". . . I also had a feeling that I did not understand their classes. My teachers never asked me and never trusted my answer. They never listened to me. So, I wanted to be silent. I thought there was no value in me" (First Int, S1). In a similar stance, S4 claimed, "I have not seen all teachers motivating all students equally. Some teachers have students of their choice" (First Int, S4). S3 found discrimination in giving marks by the teachers. She said, "We had this experience. We find variations or biases in evaluations. Some teachers neglect our answer. They always prefer some students' opinions and answers. They never

preferred my answers. So, I killed my habit of telling them the answers" (First Int, S3).

Along with the injustice, low self-esteem marks the barrier in students' agentic practices. Students do not know that they have low self-esteem, but their feelings and mindset obstruct them from being confident and energetic. S2 identified that her friends had similar problems. They always put fear in their mind, so they lose confidence. She revealed, "I always found that my friends are afraid of being judged by the teachers, so they often remained silent" (Sec Int, S2). Not only the fear but also the feeling of sadness for no concrete reason is also a sign of low self-esteem. S3 expressed her feeling that she did not like to do more when her teachers did not respond to her (Sec Int, S3). Students lose their morale when they are neglected by teachers. They are discouraged by the biasness of the teachers.

The cultural background of students is another barrier to agency. The students from some cultures are open-minded. They accept whatever is discussed in the classroom and outside. However, some students feel shy and even do not tolerate listening to the issues because of their cultural baggage. Evaluated her past that was full of shyness and backwardness. She blamed her culture. She expressed:

We many students represent rural life. We have not been taught in this way. Our culture also did not teach us to be more talkative with our teachers. I'm from a very low educational and economic background so I could not speak when I want. I was taught not to speak with the seniors. Maybe it's my barrier to interaction with teachers. (First Int, S1)

She said that later when she was inspired by a teacher, she changed her mind and started talking in class freely. She claimed, "I have changed my habit of

remaining shy and silent after Dhan (pseudo name) sir inspired me" (Sec Int, S1). In an observation class, there was a debate on adult movies. When the teacher was talking about the movie, a student suddenly stopped him. She said, "Stop it sir. I cannot listen more. It's enough" (Class Obv, 6). Other students are surprised. They said why it was difficult for her to listen. There was a debate on this issue in the classroom. After the class, in an informal talk, I asked the girl why she was shy in the class. Why did she stop her teacher from talking about the adult movie? She replied, "It was due to my cultural practice. We girls are not allowed to talk about adult cinema in my home. So, I could not be open in such a matter" (Class Obv, 6). However, other students contended that it was not a big issue for them. They were free to express whatever they liked. They claimed that their culture did not restrict them. One of the students said, "Sir, it's her weakness. We can talk about anything about adult movies as we are adults. There is no problem for me. I talk about it at my home also" (Class, Obv, 6). Another girl revealed that there is no barrier in her society to talk openly about any issue. These anecdotes show that culture can restrict students from flourishing their potential in particular social issues. Teachers' presentation or their use of pedagogy also hinder students' agency development. The students like to hear and deal with many contents, but the prescribed curriculum provides limited areas of the content. S1 highlighted her feelings:

We get rare chances in higher classes. Many teachers only teach and discuss topics given in the syllabus. Very few teachers bring social issues and other matters into the classroom besides their courses. So, we have very little chance to present our opinions and creativity in classrooms. (First Int, S1)

S4 had an opinion that their curriculum did not allow their wonders and interests to be played in classrooms. S6 also believed that she could not get issues of her interest in the curriculum. In a conversation with S2, she claimed that students show apathy in studies because of the uninteresting contents of the curriculum. She said, "Curriculum must address our needs and interests but our curriculum is not open to this. So, many of us do not put interest in studies" (First Int, S2). In this regard, T2 exhibited similar experiences that the curriculum did not provide him opportunities to foster desired atmosphere in classrooms. He claimed that the curriculum lacked the necessary instructions and supportive assessment system to foster actual agency in classrooms (First Int, T2). Not only the curriculum but also teachers' approaches can hinder students' interest in learning. S3 said, "Teachers make everything interesting when they do not only focus on the course. They easily connect course issues to our personal lives and present phenomena. So, the class becomes interesting. Otherwise, sticking only in the course makes us bored " (First Int, S3). S4 expressed a similar experience, "Some teachers came into class without enough preparation. They could not satisfy us. At that time, we wanted to leave the class. They also could not connect social issues in their teaching. We were not motivated" (First Int, S4). He further added, "When teachers play a dominant role, classrooms are not interesting. When they follow traditional pedagogies, . . . if teachers do not bring contemporary issues or do not go with time. They only go with the curriculum. Our interests are killed" (First Int, S4). T1 showed similar experiences that he could not execute proper activities supportive of students' interests and choices because of the limitations drawn by the curriculum in the case of pedagogy, contents, and assessment.

Students' desire to go with their interests matters in shaping their learning goals and achievements. Their excitements in content drive them towards active

participation and engagement. Otherwise, a lack of awareness and proficiency in the key areas can hinder the ability to make informed decisions and take effective actions. These things impact boosting their agency and blurs the chances of being critical.

However, students with strong agency have shown a willingness to engage actively in learning opportunities. They have exhibited a proactive approach to overcoming obstacles. Despite this effort, different factors such as curriculum, pedagogy, teachers' role, lack of materials, injustice, cultural background, low self-esteem, fear of failure, fixed mindset, etc. hinder students from ascertaining certain aspects of agency and criticality. The following table showcases all organizing themes and the basic themes presented and discussed above.

Table 5. Overall Thematic Findings of the Study

Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Empowering Agency Through Supportive Educational Environment	1. Curriculum and Pedagogical Approaches
	2. Institutional Culture and Environment
	3. Teachers' Support and Relationship
	4. Extra-Curricular Activities (ECA) and Real-World Engagement
	5. Personal Development and Reflection
Application of Student Agency in Classroom Context	1. Dispositional Agency
	2. Motivational Agency
	3. Positionality
Empowerment Through Voices and Choices	1. Making Choice and Critical Inquiry
	2. Critical Reflection and Metacognition
	3. Development of Critical Consciousness
	4. Resistance Through Questioning Teacher

5. Disempowerment

Constructing Agency in EFL
Learning

1. Social Network and Collaborative Learning
2. Small Wins and Long-Term Success
3. Contextual Influences and Social Dynamics
4. Identity, Self-Perception, and Autonomy in Learning
5. Challenges and Barriers to Agency

Chapter Summary

This chapter covers the explications of the information gathered from different processes: interviews, field observations, reflections, and field notes. The information gathered from interviews with teachers and students provided the foundation of initial interpretative phenomenological analysis whereas the information derived from prolonged classroom observations and reflections gave the basis for ethnographic interpretation. Interpretations are made based on the verbatims of the participants. Verbatims and vignettes have been used to support the findings and claims. Similarly, observation reflections are also mentioned to triangulate the findings from the interviews. They are used to justify the reasons and meanings of the interpretations under different themes and sub-themes. The result has been presented considering each research question aligning with the respective objectives.

Finally, merging the interpretation from phenomenological and ethnographical viewpoints has given a succinct analysis of the overall information assembled during the study. The findings are discussed in terms of thematic underpinnings. Especially, the themes relate the lived experiences of the students and teachers with observations

and reflections made by the researcher. This chapter has dealt less with the practice of critical pedagogy as the chapter has been devoted to the analysis of phenomenological findings.

Chapter Five

Empowerment of Agency Through Pedagogical Practices

This chapter mainly deals with the analysis, findings, and interpretations of filed information and observations aligning with the research question: What specific practices of critical pedagogy contribute significantly to enhancing and empowering student agency? In particular, I presented the explications of information connected to classroom observations, reflective notes, and field notes under two global themes and ten sub-themes. I adhered to research the question that demanded observation and some kind of interventions or practices relating to critical pedagogy to the empowerment of student agency. I observed classes of two teachers throughout the year in natural settings. I noted 31 classes randomly. The findings and outcomes of the influence of the practices of the critical pedagogy framework have been stated and analyzed under different themes.

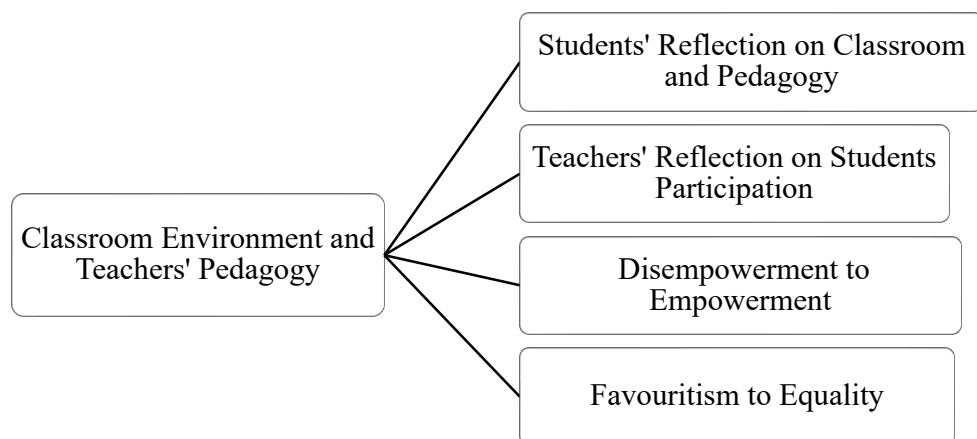
Classroom Environment and Teachers' Pedagogy

Classroom environment and teachers' use of pedagogy play a crucial role in shaping students' learning experiences and achievements. Observing these elements provide insight into the effectiveness of teaching strategies and overall learning atmosphere. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) highlight that teachers who possess strong social and emotional skills, along with a sense of well-being, are better equipped to build and sustain positive relationships with their students. This, in turn, fosters a supportive classroom environment that enhances learning and promotes students' capacity development.

Moreover, positive classroom environment refers to an uplifting emotional atmosphere characterized by qualities such as friendliness, care, encouragement, collaboration, unity, mutual support and respect, healthy competitiveness, and

constructive interactions (Harvey et al., 2012). In my observations, the classrooms were spacious and adequate for the number of students. There were sufficient seats for them. However, the seating arrangements were not flexible for practicing group works to foster collaborative learning. In the initial phase of observations, classrooms were found mostly silent. I found that teachers exhibited worries about the students' unwillingness to talk in classroom. Students were mostly the passive recipients. A few students showed interest in discussions and engagements. There were rare practices of group works, peer works and interactions. Students' disengagement and unwillingness in interaction were clearly noticeable before the teachers' interventions. I found some remarkable changes after the interventions made by the teachers I observed. These are presented and analyzed under four different sub-themes as presented in the given figure.

Figure 8. Concurrent Themes Supporting the Global Theme: Classroom Environment and Teachers' Pedagogy



Students' Reflection on Classroom Environment and Pedagogy

Students argued that their classroom settings and resources were not the causes for their disengagement and unwillingness to interact and participate in activities. Their understanding was that all teachers did not pleasingly present content. Their strategies and techniques were not very interesting and interactive. Students

perceived that their teachers only blamed them for not being active in the classroom rather than using engaging strategies. When I asked students in the classroom, "Why don't you prefer your teachers' presentations if you have no objection in the classroom setting?" One of the students replied, "It's not a matter of the size and space of the classroom. We need a pleasing presentation, I mean interactive presentation, not like the speech of leaders" (Class Obv, 3). Another student pointed out, "We are not children to sit in decorative classrooms, we need good presentations from teachers. We have no comments to our classrooms and environment" (Class Obv, 3). Considering this view of the student, the next two classes were made interactive. Teachers tried every moment to talk with students with cross-questions in the subject matter. They included all the students in the interactions. In the next class, OT1 changed the approach. He used student-led discussions. He allowed them a certain time, but they were free to choose the topics. Without hesitation, all of them presented their topics (Class Obv, 5). The next day, I asked the students, "Did you prefer yesterday's class?" All the students nodded their heads and said, "Yes sir". One student added, "Sir we want to like this class. We want to talk with teachers in every lesson they teach". The student next to her said, "I was clear in yesterday's matter. I want classes with discussions" (Class Obv, 5). That day I found all the students excited to take class (Ref. Class. Obv, 5).

These practices and students' preferences showed that students of higher levels considered the pedagogy as an important aspect. They like to have interactive presentations from their teachers. They wanted interactions with their teachers while presenting. They preferred not to limit the authority of the teachers in selecting issues or topics to lead their discussions. They appreciated interactive presentations from their teachers and valued opportunities to express their ideas in discussions.

Additionally, they preferred to take leadership roles during discussions, actively engaging in collaborative learning. They sought environments that encouraged critical thinking and participation, where their voices could be heard and respected. Students also emphasized the importance of mutual respect and a supportive atmosphere for fostering meaningful and empowering learning experiences.

Teachers' Reflection on Students Participation

The teachers expressed that students were inactive and reluctant to be involved in activities. They perceived that it was hard to change the mindset of the students. It was difficult for them to conjoin students in engagements. After observing the first class, I asked T1, "Do your students willingly take part in your activities?" OT1 replied, "You also saw it. It's very hard to join all the students in activities. You saw only very few students (10-15%) showed interest" (Class Obv, 1, OT1). They found very few students willingly taking initiative. Otherwise, students mostly copied notes or slides from them and listened to lectures.

After some consultations and discussions about the interests of students, I observed his next class after two days. I found some changes. She was able to involve more than 70% of students in the activities. I again asked her after the class, "How did you feel today?" She smiled and responded, "It was more progressive. Still not all students involved. I will try my best. I knew that we must give students a topic of their interest" (Class Obv. 2, OT1). In this class, she applied a critical reflection activity that day. Students had to talk about their involvement in all classes they were taking.

The students found interesting topics so they were involved. They discussed taking a longer time (about thirty minutes). However, all students had no habit of

talking in class. So, out of 27 students, three remained still silent. When I inquired to the silent students, they did not like to respond to me. These situations in the class showed that all students were not willingly involved in the discussions despite the teacher's flexibility in assigning the topics. Despite this, there was a noticeable improvement compared to previous lessons, as many other students actively engaged in the discussions and shared their ideas with enthusiasm.

This shift in participation gradually altered the perception of the teachers, who had previously believed that students were largely inactive, disinterested, and reluctant to involve themselves in classroom activities. Teachers began to recognize that fostering agency and providing an inclusive environment could encourage more students to contribute, even if some required additional time or tailored support to feel comfortable participating. These experiences highlighted the nuanced dynamics of student engagement and the importance of understanding individual learners' needs and motivations.

Disempowerment to Empowerment

Disempowerment occurs when students feel their voices are unheard, their contributions overlooked and their capacity undervalued by their peers, friends, families, and teachers leading to fear and anxiety (Geller, 1982). From the initial observations, I found that most teachers did not hear the students' voices. They did not pay attention to what students said during class presentations. In most of the classes, they just checked students whether they had understood or not after finishing their lectures. They did not put interactive questions or ideas during presentations. The majority of students were found silent. A few students responded to teachers. There was no cross-questioning. Only a few students asked questions to the teachers. The teachers also were not concerned about other students' silence. That caused the failure

of students to lose individual control to set up further learning goals. This was the result of rigid teaching strategies. That brought disengagement and domination. Only teachers' perspectives dominated the classroom. Such a setting diminished students' creativity, and confidence and inhibited the development of critical thinking skills leading to demotivation. When I sat with the teachers before observation, they reported that it was very difficult for them to empower students with critical thinking activities. I suggested them to use activities such as problem-posing discussions, role-playing or simulacra, community-based learning, etc. We discussed some ideas to engage students in such activities. I observed OT1's class the next day. He employed the role-playing technique. He created a situation and asked eight students to be doctors and patients, police officers and tourists, school principals and students, and job interviewers and applicants respectively. He asked them to use model verbs such as shall, should, may, might, must, can, and could. All the students repeatedly took part and used model verbs successfully (Class Obv. 5, OT1). Similarly, OT2 shared, "I found myself successful in engaging all the students when I used open-mike talk. One day I gave the students a mike to talk. I allowed three minutes for each. There were 13 students. All of them spoke for the allotted time on the issue they liked" (Ref. Class. Obv, 13).

From these examples, it became evident that empowering students was achievable when teachers adopted the approaches that actively engaged students in the learning process. For instance, employing methods such as simulations provided the students with opportunities to immerse themselves in real-world scenarios, encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Similarly, open mic discussions allowed the students to express their ideas and perspectives freely, fostering a sense of autonomy and ownership over their learning

journey. These strategies not only promoted active participation but also created a democratic learning environment where the students felt the value of their presence. Ultimately, such practices enabled students' agency such as building confidence, developing critical inquiry skills, and taking responsibility for their educational growth, aligning with the principles of critical pedagogy.

Favouritism to Equality

Students in the observed classrooms and participants in interviews reported that they were disappointed by the teachers who favoured some students in the class. They claimed many teachers had their preferred students in class. They only gave attention to one or two students who were considered talented ones in the class. They listened to them and supported them. They agreed on their answer without listening to others and without being critical. I found that this had made many students frustrated. S3 expressed, "In our class, teachers have some favorite students. The teachers only ask them. We are in the class to copy teachers' notes and listen to their conversations" (Sec Int, S3). Participants complained that some teachers favored the responses of talented students, even when their answers were incorrect. They also blamed the teachers for only taking the names of their favorites. I have presented all these with vignettes in the previous chapter.

While discussing this issue with the teachers, they did not readily accept that they had done such discrimination. In my observations, I found the teachers favoring very few students in the classrooms. They asked to do activities with two or three students frequently. Others just witnessed and remained silent. On the day, I asked OT2, "Why did you ask only these three students to read the contents? Cannot others read like them?" He said, "I know many others cannot read well. Some others can but I have to request them many times" (Ref. Class. Obv, 3, OT2). A similar question I

asked OT1. She said, "Many times I tried to ask other students. They did not show willingness. These two students always accepted my request" (Class Obs. 4, OT1).

Again, I sat with the teachers separately and discussed how to create equal chances and interest for all the students. We explored some ideas together to encourage all students and give equal chances to them and agreed to apply them in classrooms. The next day, I observed. OT2 applied the 'power mapping' technique in which all students had to tell something about the power of government. Wonderfully, all the students put their ideas. They at least told one word or phrase or sentence (RCO, 4, OT2). The same day I inquired OT2, "What is your experience today? Did all students participate?" He accepted that the participation of all the students was possible due to the power mapping technique (RCO, 4, OT2). This shows that teachers with a simple technique can cover all the students in a class. It is possible to listen and give a chance to all of them so that they feel equal. One day OT2 applied a brainstorming technique to gather ideas for searching literature for review. It was surprising that all students put their ideas.

These critical pedagogical approaches, such as the 'power mapping' technique and brainstorming, created an environment of equality by ensuring that every student had an opportunity to express their thoughts and perspectives. Power mapping allowed students to critically analyze power structures, both within the classroom and in broader social contexts, enabling them to recognize and challenge inequalities.

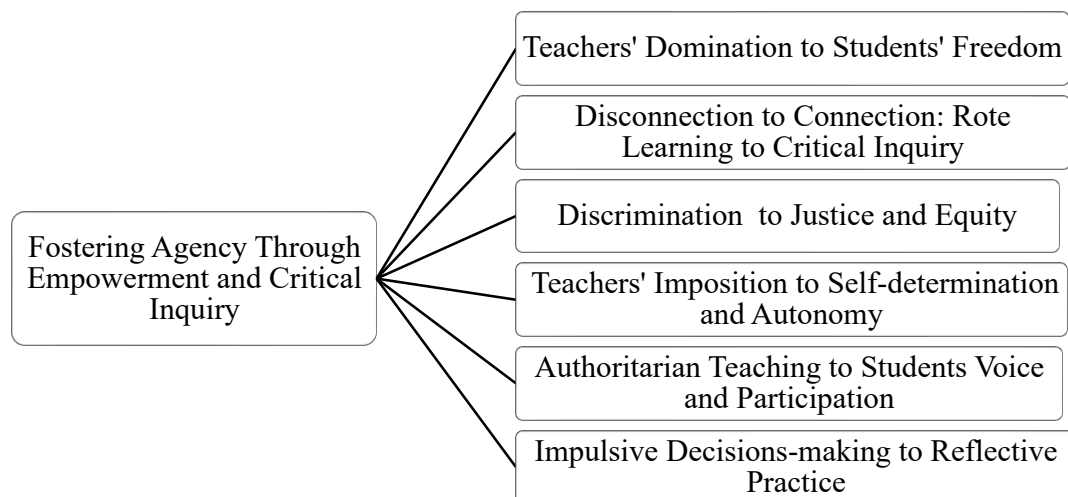
Similarly, brainstorming sessions encouraged open dialogue and collaboration, giving students the confidence to contribute without fear of judgment. These methods not only promoted inclusivity but also nurtured students' agency by reinforcing their ability to think independently, engage in critical discussions, and take ownership of their learning. As a result, such practices empowered students to actively participate

in their learning experiences, fostering a more democratic and student-centered learning environment. These practices helped to decrease favoritism and allowed justice and equality for the students.

Fostering Agency Through Empowerment and Critical Inquiry

In my observation classes, in the beginning, I just saw what was naturally going on without recording. After two weeks, I began collaborating with the teachers to intervene in their classes by fostering discussions and interactions among us. They applied approaches such as open discussions, student-led discussions, project-based learning, and collaborative and peer work in our classes. I have stated and analyzed the findings before, after, and while interventions under the global theme 'Fostering Agency Through Empowerment and Critical Inquiry'. As indicated in the figure 9, this theme incorporates subthemes which are presented below.

Figure 9. Concurrent Themes Supporting the Global Theme: Fostering Agency Through Empowerment and Critical Inquiry



Teachers' Domination to Students' Freedom

Teacher domination in the classroom occurs when teachers use monopoly discussions, make single decisions, and focus on their perspectives over students' input. In my observations and informal talks with the students, I found that

discussions in the classrooms were made with an authoritarian perspective by the teachers. They mostly imposed their topics, issues, ideas, and thoughts rather than listening to students so students showed uninterest in discussions. I elaborated the context with interview vignettes and verbatims in the previous chapter. Here, I have presented and analyzed the information from ethnographic observations.

When I observed initial classes, I found teachers imposing their ideas, topics, and issues on students while having discussions. I talked with the teachers about the context. They accepted that they needed change. We made interactions on making choices of students and creating an atmosphere to freely express their opinions, ideas, creations, and views. I used the creative expression method, where each student had to showcase something they could do. There were 13 students in the class, and their presentations varied. Eight students shared their creations, including poetry, haikus, ghazals, and jokes. One student danced, another played the guitar, and three students sang songs. After each presentation, I randomly selected individuals to give comments or compliments, which they actively participated in (Class Obv, 14).

During a class observation of OT2, the teacher used a creative expression method similar to mine. Twelve students participated by showcasing their creative talents, while the other twelve provided comments on their peers' presentations. All 24 students had the freedom to express themselves and actively engage in the activities. After the class, I asked two students about that class. They said, "When we get a chance to do in our way, we can do everything. That is the freedom we feel. Today we got the chance" (Ref. Class. Obv, 8, OT1).

These changes of the classroom scenario suggest that students ever have willingness to express their ideas and creations. Teachers can let them chances to pour out their creativity freely. This was possible using freedom of expressions, open discussions,

students' interest in the activities. Teachers were successful to participate and engage the students when teacher accepted the desire of student to conduct extra activity inside the classroom.

My experience also shows that students were ready every Friday to present their creations. When I entered the class on Fridays, I found every student in a happy mood to request me to celebrate. It means when the teachers let them excel in their interests through creative works they actively participate. On one hand, this participation helps to grow more interest in creative works. On the other, they develop their confidence in presentations. Thus, they enhance their presentation skills and speaking skills. They also have to write the content so that their writing skill is also developed.

Disconnection to Connection: Rote Learning to Critical Inquiry

Disconnections in classrooms may arise from different factors, such as a lack of engagement, differences in learning styles, and limited learning resources. Teachers reported that due to teaching methods, diverse learning styles could not accommodate the different needs of students. So, it was harder for some students to grasp concepts delivered by the teachers. It hindered the learning process. It further widened the gap between students and their educational experiences. I found that teachers did not value different styles of learning. They preferred rote learning. They just gave reading tasks and asked them to tell the answers. When they were given writing tasks, they did not appreciate the differences in writing. They expected and appreciated similar responses (Ref. Class. Obv, 6, OT2). Students argued that this kind of teaching approach hindered their willingness to further engagements. When students feel disengaged, they may struggle to connect with the material, leading to reduced participation and lower academic performance.

Considering these situations, I had interactions with OT2. He argued that it was not easier to connect his students with learning. We discussed the ways to conduct collaborative learning, where students are involved in group work and peer discussions to construct knowledge or ideas. After a few days, I observed OT2's class. He divided the class into five groups and assigned different paragraphs to each group. After reading the paragraph, a leader from the group had to tell the summary of the given paragraph in one or two sentences. Another member had to tell the possible topic of the paragraph. Interestingly, all the students were involved in the process. This shows that connecting every student in learning and creating knowledge is possible through group work and collaborative tasks.

Viewing this context, I discussed with the teachers regarding the ways to avoid rote learning. We agreed that teachers could change the dynamic of the classroom to make creative with critical thinking-based learning—encouraging students to analyze, evaluate, and create rather than memorize. In one observation class, OT1 tried to intervene with her students with the idea that students learn through evaluation and analysis. She collected some quantitative research articles and asked them list out the hypothesis. Two students wrote them in board. She asked them to read each of them and underline the variables. They had to separate independent variables from dependent variables. After doing this, he asked the definitions of these two variables. Many of the students defined well (Class Obv, 29). In that class, one student claimed, "We learnt easily without lecturing from the teacher in this way. This type of learning helps us keep in long memory. We do not need parrot learning" (Class Obv, 29). This suggests that when students have the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills by evaluating information, challenging assumptions, and

exploring diverse perspectives in the classroom, they can learn the subject matter more easily.

Conversely, a lack of critical dialogue in the classroom restrains intellectual growth and limits students' ability to engage deeply in the learning process. Students stated that they had very little critical dialogues in classrooms. They reported that they were not aware of the need to be critical. My observations witnessed superficial dominations of rote learning in the majority of classes. I found teachers being critical of the students; however, they did not allow the students to be critical. There were no chances for students to critique the teacher's views since teachers preferred rote learning.

The situation changed when the teachers engaged the students in collaborative work. The students took part actively. They were given chances to critically present, and they did. This helped to connect them to their friends in the process of learning. Collecting–evaluating–analyzing was another method that enhanced students' participation and ability to evaluate the analysis of the contents. These inductive methods of learning help students build up knowledge themselves which could remain in long memories. Overall, these approaches to teaching enhance the agency of students.

Authoritarian Teaching to Students' Voice and Participation

Authoritarian teaching is a rigid, teacher-centered approach where teachers exercise strict control over students, leaving little room for student input. In this method, rules and expectations are imposed without discussion, and students are expected to follow instructions without questioning. Authoritarian teaching can limit creativity, critical thinking, and student engagement. Considering these aspects, I sat with the other two teachers. We agreed that we mostly imposed authority in the

classes. We gave full hours one-way lecturers. We pointed out that we had to break strict lecture-based instruction, punitive discipline, and one-way communication implementing flexible, interactive, and student-centric activities. Following the interactions, I made observations of their classes. I found OT2 using think-pair-share activities in his classroom. She wrote the topic 'Models of Business Communication' on the board and divided the class into ten pairs. First, she let everyone think of one model of communication in five minutes. After making the concept, she asked them to share their ideas in pairs for another five minutes. Finally, she randomly asked five students to share their insights in the class (Class Obv, 7, OT2). All the students shared.

Similarly, OT1 adopted the flipped classroom technique. She provided the link to a video and reading materials two days earlier through the messenger group. She assigned two questions to each group. The next day, in the class, all five groups discussed for about ten minutes. She again asked the groups to watch the video once more and correct the answer. Each group presented their answers. Finally, two students commented on the overall presentations. They did well (Class Obv, 9, OT1). I asked her about the experience of the day's class. She expressed, "I felt the flipped technique could help students to engage attentively. Their collaborative work during finding the answers was quite useful because everybody curiously participated". Both students' voice and participation play crucial roles in fostering an inclusive and dynamic learning environment.

I saw a discussion on the day of the announcement of the educational tour. Students wanted to have a destination of their choice, but teachers already announced it. Due to the common voice of the students, the head of the department changed the decision as per their demand. The observation note goes:

The Head of the Department (HoD) came into the class with a notice of educational tour. She read and went out. Students started chatting to each other.

S1: They won't take us to the places we like. I don't like it. I won't go.

S2: "Yes. I feel bored. They only ask us, but they decide for themselves. Why to go?"

S3: They only asked us last year. They did not take us to our place of choice last.

S5: "No, I don't think so. You didn't tell them strongly. If we all tell them (teachers) strongly. They will listen. Let's go all and tell them our choice of destinations. They won't deny it.

S4: Yes, yes, he is right. Let's go all to say our destination. If they won't take us, we will go ourselves. We do not need them to go.

S1: I do not believe they will follow us.

S3: This time they will accept our voice. Let's go to tell HoD Madam. sir will support us in this matter.

One of the students said, "How to believe David (pseudo name) sir?"

He may tell us in front of us. All students go out to talk to the HoD.

After some time, they returned with happy decisions. They said that the HoD accepted their destination. (Class Obv, 10)

Similarly, I reported several evidence of students' participation in classroom discussions and in other activities that promoted their freedom of choice and voice. Students conducted mock interviews to collect primary data in the classroom. They celebrated Good Fridays under their leadership presenting their creative works. Those events provided every student the opportunity to excel in their potential. I noticed the

effect of these changes that helped to promote interactive classes. Encouraging students to share their opinions, ideas, and feedback not only enhances their engagement but also empowers them to take ownership of their learning achievements. Moreover, participatory approaches like think-pair-share fostered critical thinking skills, enhanced students' sense of agency, and cultivated a collaborative community where they felt heard and valued.

Ultimately, prioritizing student voice and participation creates more meaningful and impactful learning experiences. My reflective notes also revealed that students who were silent in the class felt free to question their teachers after implementing an open discussion approach in class. I also used flipped techniques in which students' engagement noticeably increased. When learning materials were given previously, every student got a chance to at least be familiar with the contents so that they could participate in discussions. This created the chance to include their voices in creating knowledge and understanding.

Discrimination to Justice and Equity

Social justice and equity in the classroom are the basis for creating an inclusive and fair learning environment. As reported by students, teachers behaved unequally in the classroom. They favoured some students only. They gave opportunities and listened to their favourite students. When there were competitive programs on campus, the teachers limited participation to a selected group of students who frequently received opportunities. These students were given priority when assignments were checked, and their answers were supported by the teachers, even if they were incorrect. It created a gap between the teachers and other students. There was no trust in each other.

Students had a concept that they should not argue with teachers. S1 said, " I was taught in my home that I should not argue with teachers and seniors. I do not think I can be critical to teachers' work" (First Int, S1). I found many other students in observation classes being reluctant and showing fear of asking questions to teachers. They did not raise questions regarding injustice and inequality. One day, OT1 allowed the students to make their own choices on project work as it was mandatory in one terminal examination. She gave them chances to select topics of their own. They were free to choose submission dates within two months (Class Obv, 16). Relating to this, OT2 shared, "This brought really change. In comparison to the last batches, students of the year did on time. Last year only 25% of students submitted the project work on a topic given by me. However, this year all students submitted in their own time".

To avoid biasness and discrimination OT1 applied peer checking and group evaluation techniques. She assigned the marks to their answers and let them assess in groups and peers to check whether there were any differences. They all showed concern to each other' writing in the class. They provided suggestions to the teacher. It helped to boost up their morale and the feeling of equity (Class Obv, 23). This involves acknowledging and appreciating diverse perspectives while actively addressing biases and removing barriers that hinder students' success.

Over time, students recognized their teachers as more responsive to their access to learning opportunities and resources. This suggests that fostering social justice and equality creates a classroom environment where every student feels valued, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential, cultivating a strong sense of belonging and community.

To avoid bias in evaluation, peer-checking, and group—evaluation became impactful practices among students. They fairly assigned marks evaluating in pairs

and groups. They understood the limitations and constraints faced by the teachers during evaluation. However, they felt a sense of equality in judgments when they were involved in the process. This process enhanced the ability to validate their answers to the evaluation. Their feeling of discrimination and bias transformed into justice and equality through the participatory approach of critical pedagogy.

Teachers' Imposition to Self-determination and Autonomy

Self-determination and autonomy empower students to take charge of their learning and develop a sense of agency and criticality. Self-determination theory provokes specific nature of positive development among learners empowering self (Ryan & Patrick, 2009) through positioning themselves in charge of their own condition. Students stated that they mostly took charge of their learning as they were the students of higher level. However, their teachers' sense of positioning of students could not positively affect for taking responsibilities and self-decisions. Once in a class, OT2 dictated his students to be good teachers in future as they were the student of education. One of the students questioned, "Sir, is it compulsory to be teacher?" She further added, "I do not like to be teacher". Then, he liked to explore their thoughts on teacher. He made open discussion. Many of them accepted to become teachers. Some students did not prefer. He asked them what they liked to be. Nobody had their self-decisions. He asked them to share their decision the next day (Class Obv, 30). These students came without decision. They said they had no idea what education students could become other than teachers. The teacher suggested different alternatives and gave them some days to think over them. The following day, two students shared that they wanted to become education officers. Another one shared to be education planner. This event showed the possibility of students' self-decision for their future goals.

On other hand, autonomy refers to how students engage themselves within the classroom context and beyond. I found students having weak position of autonomy as described by themselves. They believed that they felt weak in classroom due to low confidence, lack of adequate support, less participation. Their own beliefs and self-realization caused them to low positioning in classrooms. I found unaware of students' practice of autonomy in classrooms. They did not concern to the part of autonomy in learning. After talking to a teacher, we tried to create the positive situation.

In one class observation of OT2, I found his technique of project-based learning effective to give autonomous tasks to the students. He assigned students to find out the barriers of communication in workplace such as bank, schools, shops etc. They had to present in the classroom. He called me in the day of their presentation. I saw the students' successful efforts of being autonomous learners. Similarly, OT1 conducted an approach to self-assessment. She had prepared rubrics for checking test papers. She exchanged her students' answer sheets in pairs. She gave the rubrics and asked them to check their friend's answer allowing marks. All the students actively did the tasks. They were satisfied to be checked by their friends because they felt it was fair.

Creating such positive and supportive environments where students feel valued and capable of doing things themselves create autonomy among the students. The practices such as open discussions, project based learning, and self-assessment enhance their confidence and self-determination ultimately fostering autonomy. When the teachers practice the activities in which the students take initiatives make it better for their autonomous learning environment. Teachers' impositions hinder the way for self-determinations and autonomy because these impeded students' active involvement in learning process.

Impulsive Decision-Making to Reflective Practices

Impulsive decision-making often leads to actions taken without fully considering the consequences. Acting on impulse can sometimes result in risky or ineffective solutions, especially in high-stakes situations. When people make impulsive decisions, they may overlook important details and regret their choices later. In classrooms, teachers' impulsive decisions may lead to students' dissatisfaction causing harm to self-reflective practices.

In my observations, I did not find the teachers' sense of reflecting on their own activities. I did not use to have a habit of reflecting upon my own acts. I changed my habits. When I shared with the other two teachers about my reflective practices, they agreed to apply the techniques. OT1 and OT2 collected written feedback from their students regarding their classroom presentations and the way they treat their students. They shared the feedback with me. Mostly, students wrote pointing out the teachers' impositions in classrooms. This showed that the students did not want their teachers to impose their decisions on the students. One feedback from a student said, "I really dislike your imposition in the classroom (*Hajurle class ma jabarjasti thopareko chai sachai man pardaina*). You always tell us to do this, do that in your own way. I really hate this. It is better to decide together and listen to students' reflections also" (Class Obv, 31). This type of reflection and self-evaluation by the students helped change classroom dynamics. We three discussed the students' feedback. We started to change our decision-making procedures to self-reflection and inclusion of students' reflections before implementing the decision. This provides students with opportunities for participatory decision-making and fosters self-reflective habits that enhance their sense of agency. Instead of thinking critically, impulsive decision-making is driven by emotions, urgency, or peer pressure. This leads to

misunderstandings and frustration among students. Contrary to this, reflective practices in the classroom involve teachers critically analyzing their teaching approaches and interactions with students to continuously improve their effectiveness.

Key Findings

This section summarizes the major findings in alignment with the research objectives. The findings are derived from a thorough analysis of data collected through phenomenological interviews and ethnographic observations. These interviews provided deep insights into participants' lived experiences, while the observations captured contextual and behavioral aspects, enriching the overall understanding of the study. The key findings are presented under the following headings.

Silence to Interactive Environment

Both the practice of student agency and critical pedagogy demand an interactive environment in the classroom and beyond. This provides students with opportunities to engage in dialogue and criticism. Phenomenologically, from the participants' lived experiences, the findings show that there were not adequate practices of interactions in classrooms. Teachers regarded interaction as an important aspect of agency and criticality of students. However, they accepted that they faced difficulty in making classrooms interactive fostering dialogue and criticism.

Ethnographically, my initial observations gave me the insights that students desired interactions in classrooms and beyond. However, the frequency of demand and practice depended on the issues or contents presented in their classrooms. Students wanted dialogue and criticism on the issues that were personally and socially relevant. They showed involvement in the matter of their interest. They did not regard much to the issues or contents just essential for examinations. As a teacher myself have faced

hardships in making all the classes interactive because of their preferences in the contents and other pedagogical limitations. I could not engage them in dialogue and criticism in all the matters I presented. The classrooms mostly appeared silent.

However, some interventions such as open discussions, student-led discussions, think-pair-share techniques, and collaborative tasks used in the classrooms change the situations. These attempts encouraged students' participation so that their interactions in the learning process increased. Therefore, not only contents and issues but also the approaches are equally important with the teachers' efforts to involve students in interactions. The findings showed that interactions in the classroom were possible through critical pedagogy.

Changing the Role of Teacher and Encouraging Dialogic Relationships

Teachers play authoritative or central role through traditional pedagogy. Participants' experiences in the study indicated that most of their teachers played a dominant role in classrooms. Most of them controlled the learning process of the students. Students rarely participated in designing assignments, learning activities, and creating co-curricular activities aligning with their goals and interests. In my observations of natural classes, I found no roles of students in designing activities relating to their interest and goals unless teachers put efforts. However, with teachers' interventions applying techniques such as task-based and project-based learning, and open mike discussions there were positive shifts toward student-teacher relationships promoting a dialogic classroom environment. Therefore, shifting teachers' roles from authoritative to facilitator is necessary to enhance practices of agency which is possible through interactive engagement while assigning tasks and designing learner-centered activities. This promoted a dialogic relationship between students and teachers that set the foundations for the development of their agency.

Cultivating Peer to Peer Relationship and Co-creation of Knowledge

Phenomenological findings of the study revealed that students learnt more easily from teachers than their peers. They felt easy and flexible to get and share ideas among their peers. When they worked collaboratively, sharing knowledge and experiences, it helped to decentralize the teacher's role and built collective agency. In my observations, initially, students were reluctant to work with peers. They did not consider it an important part of learning. When teachers engaged them in collaboration with peers and groups, they showed interest to be involved. They preferred open-minded, flexible, and cooperative friends as their peers. Slowly, they established the habit of sharing with peers. Collaborative work was easier for teachers when the contents demanded peer work and group tasks. Otherwise, in forceful impositions, students did not put interest in collaboration.

Collaboration and peer work not only engaged students in given tasks but also became a process of creating knowledge when applied by other teachers. They believed that knowledge could be created and constructed in classrooms, and they gave opportunities to work in peer groups to their students. Students and teachers jointly explored the issues relevant to learners' reality. Based on the participant's information, previously there was the rare practice of co-creating knowledge in classrooms. The teachers I observed claimed that there were no provisions for constructing knowledge in the curriculum. The curriculum did not explicitly adhere to the constructed knowledge in the evaluation system. In the discussions, I encouraged the teachers to adhere to students' voices to construct knowledge. They did not readily accept that their new knowledge would be valued. Their doubt and misunderstanding could not play a positive role in co-constructing knowledge. However, efforts by the teachers adopting some critical pedagogy approaches like think-pair-share and group

discussions made it possible to co-create knowledge in a classroom context. The students created their understanding and knowledge of the issues presented in the think-pair-share practice. These findings infer that students could create their understanding and knowledge in the classrooms when teachers used facets of critical pedagogy.

Self-Reflection

Self-reflection helps students to evaluate their strengths, weakness and progress enabling personal growth and informed decision making (Erss et al., 2024). In EFL context, self-reflection empowers students to grasp the ownership of their learning. It helps to recognize the areas for improvement, and align their efforts with their goals. Experiences of all the participants showed that self-reflection was a better practice for students of higher level. They evaluated their past, progress and failure themselves so that they were able to set their learning goals. They felt that their personal growth and changing mind set have connection to self-reflection. They developed self-awareness and critical thinking through self-reflection.

By fostering critical thinking and self-awareness, self-reflection became a cornerstone for transformative learning and the development of agency, especially in student-centered and critical pedagogical frameworks. My class observations' reflections also determined that the role of self-reflection was important in developing critical thinking and self-awareness affecting the goal-setting function of self-regulation (Ponton et al., 2009). Reflective practices empowered students to take control of learning making them active participants in my classrooms. The findings showed that the practice of self-reflection in the higher level students helped setting goals. Their capacity to evaluate their learning experience critically fostered

autonomy, allowing them to make informed decisions about learning strategies and their goals in real life.

Students' Resilience and Learning Transformation

Resilience is the power of navigating challenges by understanding setbacks as learning opportunities that is crucial for maintaining agency. Resilience provides strength to challenge pre-existing beliefs, biases, and assumptions aligning with the transformative goals of critical pedagogy. Being resilient means coping strategies or change in focus (First et al., 2018). Participants' lived experiences in the study demonstrated mixed outcomes. Two participants had the experiences of coping the situations setting back to their studies despite many challenges. Other four participants had no such experiences. Teachers as participants announced that there were very few students who could navigate challenges and setback in coping the situations. They believed that resilience was relational which was formed through trusting relationships among individual students, peers and teachers (First et al., 2018). This was also the complex interplay between students and their environment, in which the student could impact successful outcomes (Adhikari, 2020). My reflective notes and some interventions showed that the environment and the teachers influenced resilient behaviour of the students. When their teachers were found to be resilient, students learnt from them. When their one of the friends or peer demonstrated resilience, other considered it as an important part of life.

With resilience, learning transformation focuses on the change in learners' understanding, behaviours, and attitudes leading to more meaningful engagements with knowledge and skills. Transformation is the way of changing the world view applying the knowledge and skills they gained from academic, personal, and social engagements. In my observations, participants did not exhibit learning transformation

through their experiences. Only one participant expressed that she had changed her perspective of being a teacher after she learned pedagogical and presentation skills from her teachers. She preferred the teacher's way of teaching and mentoring so that he adopted his style in her teaching career. Others believed that their classroom knowledge and skills did not help them in their real-life situation. Based on my observation, I found different scenarios. After the teachers' continuous encouragement and influence, students changed their mindset to look at issues differently. They cultivated a positive attitude towards the teaching profession. However, initially, they did not have a good impression of the profession.

Later, I found them applying the skill of presentation and interaction in their social life. One student could not put her views in classrooms on any matter in the beginning. OTI continuously put efforts to change her. She followed her and engaged in activities. After a few months, she got a job in a social organization. She conducted several interactive programs keeping her voice strong. This reminded the notion of Noteboom (2024), who views agency as a voluntary search for transformation which is possible through growth mind set (Mac Donnell Mesler et al., 2021). By connecting learning to real-life experiences, students develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and social awareness. This approach empowers them to become active agents in their communities, using education as a tool for change. Therefore, transforming classroom activities into real-world social contexts was achievable through critical pedagogy, which encouraged students to analyze, question, and engage with societal issues.

Chapter Summary

This chapter mainly deals with the analysis of ethnographical observations, reflections, and field notes. It states the analysis and findings before, after, and while practicing critical pedagogy approaches under the global theme 'Fostering Agency

Through Empowerment and Critical Inquiry'. After identifying the global theme, subthemes were outlined and presented elaboratively. Under the themes, I have broadly presented the information based on ethnographic observations. I made the analysis incorporating the insights from the observation notes, reflections, verbatims, and vignettes. The explanation covers the findings through the lens of the researcher and with the report gained from observations, field notes, reflective notes, and informal talks with the participants and the teachers. This result provides the situation of classrooms and beyond respective to the use of critical pedagogy to raise students' skills and ability to be critical and enhance skills of critical thinking, self-reflecting, critical inquiry, etc. The chapter succinctly presents how the teachers and the researcher intervened in the classroom activities with the approaches of critical pedagogy such as flipped classroom, open discussions, think-pair-share technique, self-reflection, project-based learning, student-led discussions, open-mice discussion, etc. The analysis shows that these approaches yielded positive or transformative changes in classroom situations encouraging students to the enhancement of student agency. Overall, this chapter provides insight into the classrooms about the practice of critical pedagogy and the changes in learners' capacity. The analysis mirrors the situations of pedagogical practices in terms of critical pedagogy in the classrooms before and after the interventions. It reveals that during the interventions, the teachers utilized open discussions, critical inquiries, student-led interactions, etc. as frameworks of critical pedagogy that were supportive of the positive transformation of students' learning behaviors to the enhancement of agency.

Second part of the chapter presents summary of key findings from phenomenological ethnography. This provides the practices and the situations of the intersections between critical pedagogy and student agency in EFL classrooms.

Chapter Six

Discussion: Integration of the Findings with Literature

Phenomenologically, the study explored the lived experiences of the participants through interviews whereas ethnographically, this investigated the empowerment of student agency through critical pedagogy in EFL classrooms from the observations of two teachers. Their interventions and influences through critical pedagogy approaches have made noticeable changes in the empowerment of agency in a classroom context. Triangulating the insights from interviews and observations, the overall findings have been discussed in this chapter with relevant theories and literature. Moreover, I delved into my reflections within ethnographic field observations and from phenomenological encounters to ascertain key findings to the discussion.

This chapter presents a succinct discussion of findings aligning with related literature and theories, organizing under thematic headings resonating emergent themes from the explication of information and analysis.

Empowering Agency Through Supportive Educational Environments

The initial part of the findings addresses the relationships of curriculum and pedagogical approaches to empower student agency. Heilala et al. (2024) believe that empowering student agency is not merely about a single student's intentions but also about how all students interact with the curriculum, pedagogical approaches and learning environment. The findings show that the institutional environment provides a multitude of capabilities from which students select aspects thereby creating personal and actual environments (Ponton et al., 2009). Findings show that students desire a close connection of their needs to be reflected through curriculum and pedagogy used in classroom. This helps to explore and spill their willingness by being engaged. This

is similar to Mitra (2004), who views that students want to be genuinely consulted in a manner where they feel that their input is valued, actions are taken based on their feedback, and the outcomes of these consultations are communicated and discussed with them. This is possible through the use of critical pedagogy and flexible environment. Li et al. (2024) believe that using the critical pedagogy the teachers can put emphasis on students' learning agency with the shift from teacher centered to learner centered teaching. They further agree that caring and trusting relations with students create comfortable and favourable learning environment in high quality teaching. Within this context, for teachers who want to foster agency in language teaching, need to identify the key features of a classroom environment where students actively engage and take ownership of their learning (Adhikari, 2024; Li et al., 2024). The environment directly influences teachers' thinking and classroom practices.

According to Bandura (1999), social cognitive theory recognizes three forms of environment: imposed, selected, and created. The findings demonstrate that teachers practice imposed environment where they place themselves in the center of guiding students which is against students' needs and expectation. On the one hand, this is similar to Birt et al. (2019), who project physical and psychological characteristics of the teaching environment that comprise teachers' belief, behaviors and values which effect students' agentic practices. The classroom should prioritize students' needs, interests, and learning styles for enabling students to take ownership of their learning (Li et al., 2024). On the other hand, the findings reveal that teachers do not have outstanding and varied skills and willingness to explore, change, and reflect on their pedagogies and the environment they create.

However, there are numerous elements of an imposed environment that can still be cognitively evaluated, leading to the development of conative determination.

Additionally, the created environment presents numerous opportunities from which individuals can select aspects, thus shaping their personal and actual environments. Ultimately, students have the capability to create entirely new environments that would not otherwise exist. This concept of reciprocal determinism allows for these three types of environments— imposed, selected, and created— to coexist, thereby enhancing students' personal agency (Ponton et al., 2009). In consistent with the participants views, Kane et al. (2014) believe that student engagement, critical thinking and reflection are stimulated by learner-centered environments. The findings of the study disclose that they are not sufficiently considered. Students have not experienced this kind of environment although teachers need to consider everyday pedagogical conversations with the students to let forward their perspectives and voices from the classroom environment through activities and engagements.

These forms of ongoing interaction render attitude into action, which creates a culture of student voice in practice (Cook-Sather & Matthews, 2023). This view is also in consistent with Erss et al. (2024) who consider that student agency is articulated in the agentic engagement through the ability of students to influence their learning environment to make more conducive. One way in which the environment shapes the students' agency potential is through the availability of resources (Kuzhabekova & Amankulova, 2024), particularly when using critical pedagogy approaches. Therefore, agency is a capacity to set goals, make choices and deliberate decisions, solve problems with in potential learning environment (Erss et al., 2024). On the other hand, classrooms that feature students' voice practices are often marked by high levels of active learning (Conner et al., 2024) in the critical pedagogy, collectively contribute to the cultivation of student agency, thereby impacting student outcomes (Warnby, 2024).

In addition to the environment, teachers' supports and relationships are other crucial aspects of empowering agency. It plays an influential role in shaping student agency (Adhikari, 2024). However, the findings show that there is lack of strong bonding between teachers and students. Somehow participants satisfy with the support of their peers and some teachers. My participants' experiences are in consistent with the finding of Li et al. (2024), who found that students seek a caring and trusting relations with teachers so that they can learn and grow in an easy environment. Group works, collaborative learning, peer engagements are useful to create supportive environment assumed by the pedagogy among teachers and students. Students find themselves busy in collaborating to each other whereas teachers have the opportunity to recognize students' agency that is important as it enables students to have command over their learning and promoting autonomy (Adhikari, 2024). When students have chances to work in groups and with peers, they are capable to uncover and choose options that best match their own preferences (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999), they will share responsibilities and power to each other. This perspective and its findings resonate with Adhikari (2024), who discovered that effectively fostering student agency requires collaboration between students and teachers, encompassing activities both inside the classroom and in broader social contexts. Moreover, through the relationships with teachers and friends, identity emerges and discursively constructed (Torres et al., 2020). Construction of identity meant a way of growing personality and capability that is similar to 'self-construct' as assumed by self-system theory under which personal growth is essential through self-directed learning while developing agency.

Additionally, personal growth and reflection through self-directed learning, critical thinking, problem-solving, and feedbacks are essential for empowering

agency. The results of the study show the relationship between personal growth and reflection while developing agency. The reflection means a “knowing-in-action” that provokes students to think about their works (Torres et al., 2020). The result exhibited that practice of students' self-reflection provides the foundation for setting and achieving long term goals. In this, students put their own mind and heart to fix their goals. They are driven self for practicing and doing the things they need. They set up learning goals themselves. This aligns with the view of Fishbach and Woolley (2022), who state that when persons feel they are engaged in a task, they learn to associate the task with self-reflection and thus finds intrinsically motivated to do it for long term. Thus, the task of self-reflection is to honor the facets of a person's self, such as cognitive, valuation (Chen-Levi et al., 2024), and dispositional states as well as personal commitments (Oshana, 2005). Such self-commitments regulate socially and personally constituted capability that enabled free will which matters for self-criticism. The results express similarity to the findings of Chen-Levi et al. (2024), they found that practice of critical self-reflection enables individuals to critique own assumptions and beliefs. Such a reflective evaluation enables students engaging in critical discourse to assess underlying belief, values, and assumptions fostering their agentic capacity.

The findings further show that inquiry-based learning enables critical thinking skills of students since the methods improve mental aspects of students such as interpretation, analysis, and evaluation. These findings align with the previous studies that have shown students' critical thinking capacities importantly higher when they are taught through inquiry-based learning (Wale & Bishaw, 2020). When students develop the habit of asking thought-provoking questions in and outside of the classroom, they walk to the path of self-regulated learning. The findings of this study

have similar ground that students in the initial days did not question so they did not move to the path of self-regulated learning. However, after being aware of the significance of asking questions, they developed habit of inquiry. They questioned to their own assumptions and teachers' presumptions. Thus, they moved to the way of self-regulation.

Feedbacks are another aspect to shape self-perception of students. One of the findings exhibits the importance of feedbacks in promoting the effective use of communication among peers, friends, and teachers. Participants' experiences show that it promotes individual to reflect on the effective use of language (Torres et al., 2020). Feedbacks provide satisfactory learning achievements to students. With the constructive feedbacks and guidance of teachers, student agency can concurs in synchronization (Li et al., 2024). The balance between teachers' guidance and student agency includes qualities like persistence and decision-making, which empower individuals to overcome challenges and take advantage of opportunities (Warnby, 2024). In another way, feedback plays crucial role in promoting self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy enhances critical thinking and creativity. The findings illustrate that individuals with high self-efficacy tend to be more persistent and exert greater effort in tasks or situations. Critical thinking is cultivated as students boost their self-efficacy and engage in logical reasoning based on provided evidence. This process involves inference, deduction, and argumentative discussion to validate ideas. Overall, these activities can improve critical thinking and creativity resulting in better learning and outcomes. This is similar to the opinion of (Supnoon & Chonchaiya, 2024). Agency, resulting from the critical thinking promotes autonomy in learners.

Application of Student Agency in Educational Experiences

This global theme captures how students utilize different dimensions of agency through their educational journey of language learning. It deals mainly three themes: dispositional, motivational and positionality (Vaughn, 2020). It sheds light on the different moments and methods by which students activate these dimensions to enhance their learning, overcome challenges and engage meaningfully with their educational environment. Dynamic application of student agency undergoes the interplay of personal beliefs, motivations and social contexts in shaping students' experiences and achievements.

The findings of the study display that students apply the dimensions of their agency: dispositional, motivational and positionality (Jaaskela et al., 2021) at various junctures and in different ways throughout their classroom as well as social or personal experiences.

Dispositional Agency

Dispositional agency encompasses various key elements that empower students to take charge of their actions and decisions. They are showcased while setting goals, having perseverance, and adopting growth mindset. This mindset fosters resilience and willingness to take initiatives which ultimately lead to greater personal achievements. The findings exhibited that personal agency includes self-regulatory thought and action (Ponton et al., 2009) through setting goals, adopting growth mindset and resilience. The few participants' experiences illustrated their growth mindset, aligning with Bandura's perspective. He posits that when individuals encounter difficulties, their self-doubts can diminish their efforts lead them to quickly abandon their attempts, opting for easy solutions instead (Bandura, 1989). However, the experiences of the participants align with Bandura's clarification that those who

possess a strong belief in their capabilities tend to put in greater effort to overcome challenges.

Moreover, student agency analytics serves as a tool for students' self-reflection, self-regulation, and academic advising, and for teachers' pedagogical development in higher education (Jaaskela et al., 2021). Finally, agency is not the same as freedom. It helps simply to reduce oversight and lessening the restrictions on student activity (Lindgren & McDaniel, 2012) that obviously promotes students' capacity for self-learning, choosing right options, making decision, critiquing capacity and so on. It is partly based on self-efficacy of beliefs that individual decide which challenges to take on and how much effort to invest in pursuing them (Bandura, 1989). His social cognitive theory underpins agentic ability as self-determination exercised as self-regulation, the most significant intentional component of self-efficacy.

Growth mind set is another component of dispositional agency. The findings of this study are inconsistent with the findings of Rhew et al. (2018) whose conclusion indicated that students with a growth mindset did not attribute their failures to external factors; instead, they sought ways to improve their performance in subsequent assessments. Students with a growth mindset often consider learning goals as a means of increasing competence, and are more likely to acquire adaptive learning patterns (Mac Donnell Mesler et al., 2021). Similarly, the participants with a growth mindset believed that intelligence was flexible and could alter, and through their disappointments, they learned and grew. Another finding shows that students with growth mindset had higher level of self-efficacy and willingness to participate and keep on in a task. Similarly, growth mindsets are considered having positive effects on motivation and resilience in disappointment whereas fixed mindsets are said to

diminish motivation (Mac Donnell Mesler et al., 2021) cultivated by traditional pedagogy. Finally, a growth mindset encourages the view that abilities and intelligence can be developed through dedication and hard work, which enhances learning and resilience strengthening capacity building.

Resilience is the ability to recover quickly from difficulties and adapt to change. It involves developing the ability to effectively respond to and recover from challenges and adversities. The findings from the classroom observations found many students lacking skills to encompass flexibility, mental strength and an optimistic outlook which are key traits of being resilient. They did not like to face difficult problems. This is in contrary to First et al. (2018), who believe that resilience embraces the process of coping effectively with harmful, challenging experiences and eschewing negative outcomes. However, some participants' experiences reveal that they are being resilient coping the strategies or changing focus from the difficult situations. This aligns with Adhikari (2020), who defines resilience as the ability to quickly and efficiently regain strength and recover from difficulty. He further explains that the relational resilience is formed through a web of strong and trusting relationships among practitioners which is similar to one of the participants who claimed to have adopted from the support of friends, family, and teachers.

Motivational Agency

Motivational agency is the ability of students to take initiation, set goals and persist in following achievements despite challenges. Agency in students comprises their self-belief, internal drive, and proactive behaviour in pursuing academic and personal growth. Under the theme of "Motivational Agency", the sub-theme; extrinsic motivation vs intrinsic motivation is dealt here.

Intrinsic Motivation Versus Extrinsic Motivation. Intrinsic motivation drives someone to engage in activities for their inherent satisfaction and enjoyment. It does not seek separate consequence or external rewards. It arouses from person's internal will. A common approach to evaluate motivation involves asking people about their experience and feelings while performing the task (Fishbach & Woolley, 2022). One of the findings reveals that all the participants were mostly driven by their self-motivation. However, they agreed that intrinsic motivation was not absolute factor. Iyengar and Lepper (1999) claim that theorists have demonstrated the link between the provision of choice and human motivation. Motivation and choices are reciprocal. Where more choices available, the more students will be able to find alternatives to match their personal choices. The result also demonstrated that the participants felt motivated when they had choices and chances to go with their preferences. This perspective is similar to Fishbach and Woolley (2022), who asserted that intrinsic motivation is linked to the tasks students engage in and their self-expression. Hence, the stronger the link between an activity and its end goal, the more intrinsically motivated the activity feels. Depending on the goal, a student might feel excitement, relief, or elation. To assess intrinsic motivation, a common method involves asking individuals about their experiences and emotions while engaging in the activity.

Additionally, the results resonate the finding of Rhew et al. (2018), who explored that students with intrinsic motivation developed a sense that they were able to succeed academically. As a result, students who had internal motivators tended to take responsibility for their own achievements and failures. The participants agreed that they were mostly intrinsically motivated in their higher academic journey. They accepted that in past school life extrinsic motivations played the role. At that time, the

individual could not separate pursuing the activity from receiving its benefits. However, in higher level their source of motivation is the self which confines them to their end goal. This contrasts to the view of Rhew et al. (2018), who believes that students who were extrinsically motivated were concerned with the end results (e.g., grades, prizes) more than the task-completion process.

The boundaries between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation may need to be reconsidered when taking into account the interdependent self for whom conformity to one's in-group is an integral aspect of the self-system (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). However, students might use dispositional agency to tackle a complex task, drawing on motivational agency to stay engaged and using their positionality to bring in diverse perspectives and resources.

Positionality

As a dimension of student agency, positionality projects the outcome of the students' interactions with peers and teachers, accessing resources and support during classroom discussion and collaborative works. It refers to how students' identity, social positions and relationship within classroom affect their ability to exercise agency. In positionality, students use their experiences to make sense of new information and to continue new perspectives in class discussions. The findings of this research suggest that students' identity, self-expression, their involvement in group work, peer works, collaboration, and their relationship with teachers play crucial role in shaping position. This position significantly affects the enhancement of their agency.

Identity and Self-expression. The findings indicate that identity emerges through participation in classroom and outside activities with a self-expression (Torres et al., 2020). Students' personal experiences, cultural backgrounds and

identities contribute significant perspectives to classroom discussions and activities. Their attitudes, behaviours, and cultural background are the causes that influence experiences and identities. Further, a student's identity is discursively constructed through relationship with friends and teachers. Peer assessment, group works and collaborative learning are useful tools for creating identity and forming self-expression (Kane et al., 2014). As Torres et al. (2020) mention teacher's feedbacks help to shape students' self-perception that motivates students to reflect on the effects of their language use.

Finally, identity and self-perception are formidable part of individual student's academic engagement. It is constructed through continuous engagement in activities. They are not constant. When students' identity changes, their reflections towards things or issues changes.

Group Work, Peer Assessment and Collaboration. Findings of the research suggest that group work, peer assessment and collaboration are student centric activities that promote student engagement, critical thinking and reflection. They develop metacognitive skills and enhance students' capacity to use and transfer knowledge across academic contexts (Kane et al., 2014). In addition, the findings echo the views of Chen-Levi et al. (2024). They view that agency results from the relationship between individual student and collective perceptions and intentions. The conditions for the relationships are to be provided by the institutions, teachers and surrounding community.

In addition to the group work and collaboration, the result uncovers that peer assessment provides chances to assess students' status and the progress. This aligns with the findings of Kane et al. (2014), which suggest that discussing progress and strategies with peers and groups enables students to learn self-regulation and

independently evaluate whether they are on the right track. By finding out the progress, students can prepare new strategies to self-regulation and progression. Finally, it can be said that group work, peer support, and assessment modality offers a secure atmosphere where members are enabled to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings coping the strategies (First et al., 2018). In addition, collaboration gives opportunities to share learning responsibilities (Cook-Sather & Matthews, 2023). These practices bring openness to differences, moral discourse, and self-reflection among the members. It helps to foster student autonomy (Chen-Levi et al., 2024). In conclusion, collaborative learning modality provides students different choices. Similarly, group works foster moral discourse and peer assessment brings safe environment for self-reflection and evaluation of one's progress.

Empowerment (Disempowerment) Through Voice and Choice

Critical pedagogy (CP) emphasizes the role of education in challenging social injustices. As an educational approach, it empowers students to become agents of change. The findings of the research indicate that in classroom and beyond, when students practice agency, they experience CP in several impactful ways. The experience of critical pedagogy comes with the ways of making choices and critical inquiries.

Making Choice and Critical Inquiry

Students have their own choices. The contents presented by the teachers under prescribed curriculum may not address the choices of the students. They seek to underlie their interest in classroom through activities and engagements. In line with this, the findings of the study specifies the idea of (Mitra, 2004) who perceives that student voice impacts agency by strengthening ability of students to articulate what they think. In classroom and outside, by developing meaningful student voice,

teachers can boost up greater perception of agency (Moore, 2022). He further explains that when students feel their voice is important, it effects on their perception of agency. It brings positive outcomes which leads to greater learning and a greater role in society.

On contrary, the findings disclose that students have less opportunities to go with their choices which is against the understanding that more choices available, the more students will be able to find alternatives that best suit their personal likings (Martin, 2004). Moreover, students' choice gives them the chances to show one's preferences and to express one's internal traits. Results of the study also exhibit that teachers do not willingly give chances to have preferences and choices in classrooms. Few teachers who allow the choices but do not have appropriate plans to integrate agentic activities. This deficiency impedes the enhancement of agency as described by Bandura (2001), who asserts that agency encompasses not only the ability to make deliberate choices and action plans but also the capacity to shape appropriate courses of actions and to motivate and regulate their execution.

In addition to the choice, students voice is an expression of student thinking, concerns, and goals within the social context of the classroom (Vaughn, 2021). However, the findings do not coincide the arguments of Vaughn. He further believes that inquiry approach with student voice advocate to promote student agency where they could articulate their thinking and ideas. Similarly, Mitra (2004) states that student's voice affects agency by allowing students' capacity to express what they think and allow their ideas of leadership to develop.

Furthermore, inquiry-based learning improves mental activities of students that promotes students' skills in interpretations, analysis, and evaluation. It also promotes skills of making inferences and self-reflection (Wale & Bishaw, 2020).

They also emphasize that when students learn to formulate their own thought-provoking questions and provide explanatory answers both inside and outside the classroom, they are well on their way to self-regulating their learning.

Moreover, making choice and critical inquiry are integral part of classroom practices. Making free choices of students helps to develop their critical inquiry. Habits of critical inquiry keep them exploring choices, thoughts and reflections. Both of them are crucial aspects of developing agency. However, the findings illustrate that there is not much practice of hearing student voices and choices in the classrooms through inquiry based learning.

Critical Reflection and Metacognition

These are necessary components of effective learning that empower students to become self-aware and self-driven. Through critical reflection, students thoughtfully analyze their learning experiences. They can assess what they have learned, how they have learned. They also can evaluate effectiveness of their learning strategies. In light of these, the findings of the research highlight the concerning state of classrooms where critical reflection is less practiced. This is similar to Oshana (2005) who asserts that absence of critical reflection and indifference to one's self-conception obscure student agency. Student agency is often expressed in the engagements in which students actively influence their learning environment to create more conducive ones (Erss et al., 2024).

Contrasting with, the findings further discloses the positive outlook of metacognition within students. Participants have the awareness and regulation of one's thought processes. It involves two key components: knowledge about cognition and regulation of cognition. Students are not merely agents of action but self-evaluator of their own performance. This findings align with Bandura (2001) who

asserts that in metacognitive activity, individual judges the correctness of their predictive and operative thinking against the outcomes of their actions. He further explains that a key aspect of agency is the metacognitive ability to reflect on oneself and evaluate the adequacy of one's thoughts and actions. The same applies to metacognitive activity. In daily interactions, people act based on their thoughts and later assess how effectively those thoughts helped them manage various situations (Bandura, 1989). People with metacognitive ability show consciousness of projected goals and expected outcomes.

Furthermore, metacognition and learning environment have close relation. Metacognition can be promoted by creating and nurturing learners supportive environment (Kane et al., 2014). Metacognitive ability can integrate transfer of learning form one situation to the next. The findings exhibit that participants of the research used metacognitive ability to revisit their own actions and decisions. This is similar to Bandura (2001), who asserts that through reflective self-consciousness, individual assess their own values and pursuits.

In conclusion, when students cultivate metacognition ability and critical reflection they can plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning process critically which offer them satisfaction and sense of pride. In Chen-Levi et al. (2024)'s terms, this is 'higher order of active learning' which inherently helps to boost critical thinking ability among students.

Resistance Through Questioning Authority

One of the findings of the study demonstrates that resistance through questioning authority in classroom has less impact. Although it enables students to perceive an active role in classroom, they tend to be less critical. Students develop critical thinking skills by challenging assumptions and questioning the status quo. It

helps to develop deeper understanding to the subject matter. Questioning habit promotes students to the level of resisting authority in classroom and in their social life. Before the interventions, the finding was depressing regarding the practices of questioning to teachers against their authoritative behaviours. However, after some interventions, I found hopeful change. It required active and engaged participation in its call for education that is for liberation and requires learners to move from positions of oppression to active participation (Mora, 2014). Moreover, Freire (2005a) believes that active participation of people in interactions is possible if they are cultivated through education system. Therefore, he advocates on critical interactions which is necessary from school classrooms. In similar stance, Peter McLaren argues that critical pedagogy is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structure of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-state (McLaren, 1999). Kareepadath (2018) further puts that critical pedagogue should start from the 'knowledge of the learner' and not to stick to it but move beyond to become free of the knowledge positions. Similarly, Fabbian and Carney (2018) opine that students develop awareness and basic knowledge to critically analyse kinds of justice in their day to day lives if students' contextual cultural contents are fostered.

Additionally, critical pedagogy provides students chances to resist and question authority. It helps to generate positive behavioural changes in students' lives. This is a strategy that enhances students' consciousness, understanding, and judgment (Uddin, 2019). Therefore, critical pedagogy of schooling goes beyond a 'reflective' approach to teaching (Smyth, 2011). Furthermore, learner-centred pedagogy with activities and tasks that enhance student engagement, critical thinking, and reflection

foster the development of metacognitive skills and support students' ability to apply and transfer knowledge across different academic settings (Kane et al., 2014). In EFL context, teachers and students are equally responsible for creating these settings.

Further, critical thinking can improve creativity, time management and logic, which results in better learning (Supnoon & Chonchaiya, 2024). Critical thinking is developed when students think logically based on the evidence provided, followed by inference, deduction, and argumentative discussion to verify the ideas (Erss et al., 2024) flourished in their classrooms. That process sheds the light to the critical and creative environment in the classrooms fostering the capacity of the students.

Development of Critical Consciousness

Developing critical consciousness means recognizing and understanding social, political, and economic injustices. It stems from self-understanding and reflection. It allows students to question and challenge oppressive structures. Development of critical consciousness is possible through education and dialogues. My findings from the study show mixed perception of students regarding critical consciousness. One common perception among students is that being critical in the classroom means going against the teacher. Another conception believes that making critical inquiries in classroom is the preparation for further social life. From the teachers' perspective, the findings reveal that practicing critical thinking in classrooms doesn't simply involve students asking critical questions to teachers. Instead, it's about fostering a level of consciousness in students. Thus, classroom activities, involvements, and interactions are to be enabled to advance critical consciousness among students. This is similar to the concept of Freire (2005b), who strongly believes that banking model of education only feeds students. Thus, they lack critical understanding and critical thinking capacity to cope their day-to-day life from

different social, political, moral, economic oppressions. Thus, teachers' practice of critical pedagogy in classroom develops consciousness in students.

Findings from my classroom observations showed that students initially did not want to be critical. They had understanding that being critical meant going against teachers or authorities. However, they changed later with some influences by the teachers. This is close to Freire (2005a), who declared that banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The model attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness; the changed practice strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality. Freire mainly provokes for the consciousness of students towards critical intervention through critical education. For him, a "banking" concept of education, enables learners to view the world as a static, a given to which students must adapt, and learners as "containers," or "depositories" to be "filled" by the teachers. This banking model is a misguided system in which knowledge is the gift bestowed by those who considers themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing (Fabbian & Carney, 2018). For Freire (2005b), banking system of education reduces students' creative power and stimulates passivity. This affects the learners' understanding. They simply adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality bestowed them.

Similar to Freire, Aliakbari and Faraji (2011) believe that critical educators put concern on emancipatory knowledge that enables students to understand how power relations in society manipulate social relationships. It also helps oppressed students by identifying with them that the learners are not recipients of knowledge rather they become creators.

Finally, critical pedagogy, assumes that education can never be purely disinterested rather it either functions to preserve the status quo, thus serving the power structures in a society, or it works to set up the status quo through challenging, critiquing, resisting, or subverting those power structures . In critical education, teachers have also a critically reflective role to produce open and equal circumstances, they must engage in deep self-reflection on their position. The teachers' supportive role obviously affects their authority in the classroom (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011) that helps to foster equal opportunities to engage in dialogue or critical interactions among the students.

Empowering Agency in EFL Context

This theme captures how students in EFL classroom navigate and make sense of their educational experiences by using personal motivation, social identities, classroom environments. This also includes resilience, feedback, and achievements.

The theme highlights the holistic and dynamic nature of agency where backgrounds, goals, and interactions of individual student shape their sense of control within learning context. It is a collective approach to make a sense of their agency. This global theme consumes some other sub-themes. They are discussed below with the relevant theories and literature.

Social Network and Collaborative Learning

Social networking and collaborative learning are important facets of today's language learning context. They foster peer interaction and knowledge sharing with peers, friends, and teachers. The result of the study aligns with Adhikari (2024) who asserts that practical implication of agency involves collaboration between students and teachers, including the language learning activities within classrooms and beyond. Similarly, collaborative learning enhances active learning, engagement, and

critical thinking which are facilitated by the networks of peers, friends, family, teachers, and society. These networks accelerate students to connect, communicate, and collaborate within and beyond the classroom. One finding provided by Conner et al. (2024) reveals that students showed higher levels of effective engagement in their classes when they felt their voices were heard by their teachers and peers.

Additionally, the result shows that utilizing the networks, students develop social skills to solve problems, complete assignments, and achieve common goals utilizing social networks. This is similar to Noteboom (2024) and Shapiro (2005), who view that agency relationships are enacted in a broader social context and rocked by outside forces like relationships, competitors, interest groups, regulators, etc. On the other hand, teachers' involvement as a major network in classroom activities serve to inspire students to actively participate in given works and situations (Adhikari, 2024). With this involvement, the individual student can influence a successful outcome by using internal and external networks which promote collective agency as provisioned by Ponton et al. (2009). They assert that collective agency is exercised when an individual enlists a group of others to work with the agent in support of personal performance goals. On the other hand, Bandura (2006) claims that to operate personal agency and collective agency a broad network of social context influences.

In conclusion, using broad social networks with collaborative learning enhances collective agency and personal agency of students. For utilizing the network, students and teachers need to engage in combining activities inside and beyond the classroom with collaborative learning approaches.

Small Wins and Long Term Success

Small achievements have a significant effect in the development of personal agency. It helps to set goals for long-term success. Celebrating small achievements

builds confidence and motivation to tackle more significant challenges to achieve the greatest personal efficacy and productivity regardless of any barriers. The findings illustrate that small achievements boost up confidence and morale to students for targeting long term goals. Students' small achievements are the crucial steps that occur along the journey towards long-term goals. They play a significant role in maintaining motivation and providing a sense of success. From my observations and interviews, I found that students really wanted small wins. It is human nature to be happy in achievements. The achievements give them a sense of the success to move ahead for gaining long-term attainments. They can alter the complex situation to easier to move forward. This is similar to Ebabuye and Asgedom (2024), whose findings reveal that students having ability to influence their learning settings can modify learning experiences for a long time.

Furthermore, students' self-guidance and projected achievements motivate them for setting long term goals. So, they will be engaged in effortful tasks if they have the chance to overcome short term aims (Bandura, 2001; Custers & Aarts, 2005). The findings also indicate that students with a growth mindset view learning objectives as a way to enhance their abilities and are more likely to develop adaptive learning behaviors (Juutilainen et al., 2024). These students always show eagerness to achieve academic success (Bahou, 2012). Therefore, agency is optimally realized as a student's interest and enthusiasm for learning when teaching, materials, or methods resonate with one's long term learning goals (Heilala et al., 2024). Additionally, agency is therefore a capacity to set goals, make choices and deliberate decisions, solve problems (Erss et al., 2024) based on small achievements in course of learning. In conclusion, agency expands students' capacity to be and to do, giving them choices

about what they achieve and how they set and pursue long-term goals (Ebabuye & Asgedom, 2024).

Challenges and Barriers to Agency

Findings of the study exhibit that challenges and barriers to agency boosting are the consequences of some important facets of educational context of students. They always stem from students' contexts of learning. Insufficient access to educational materials, financial support, and technological tools obstructs the capacity to take initiative and achieve goals effectively. These findings align with the discoveries of Birt et al. (2019). On the other hand, social expectations, cultural values, gender biasness, socioeconomic status can limit opportunities and discourage agency (Anderson, 1996). Besides, lack of knowledge in the key area, low self-esteem, fear of failure and fixed mind set can hinder the ability to make informed decisions and take effective action.

Furthermore, unstable or unsuitable institutional environments, institutional biasness, inequalities reward system can restrict access to opportunities and necessary supports to students (Anderson, 1996). Similarly, agency can limit due to teachers' personal behaviours and characters that influence how they think about teaching and the way they enact reform-based practices in classroom (Birt et al., 2019). To surmount these obstacles, students must develop resilience—the ability to recover their strength and spirit when facing challenges quickly and effectively (Adhikari, 2020). Continued perseverance is essential for student agency, fostering attributes such as the capacity to make choices and take ownership of one's learning goals. Agency also includes characters such as firmness and decision-making, permitting individuals to handle barriers and take opportunities (Warnby, 2024). Moreover,

student agency acts as both a goal and a tool to empower learners in navigating new learning context.

In conclusion, there are various factors to impede student agency in their learning journey. On one hand, teachers' instructions, values, belief, behaviours, characteristics, and way of thinking influence students' agency promotion. On the other, agency is affected due to students' own capacity to persist the situation, problems and challenges with their beliefs, attitudes, and perseverance in learning language skills. Next, other external factors such as institutional environment, overall educational setting, curriculum, etc. obstruct fostering agency.

Identity, Self-Perception, and Autonomy in Learning

In the view of participants, these elements are fundamental to the learning process. For them, identity allows to see themselves within their educational journey, self-perception influences their beliefs about their abilities and potential, empowering their progress. And autonomy, which involves a sense of ownership and responsibility, encourages students to take initiative and make informed decisions about their learning goals. Literature find these characteristics as contributing factors to a dynamic and personalized learning experience, enhancing resilience and fostering lifelong learning and simultaneously boosting agency (Ebabuye & Asgedom, 2024; Torres et al., 2020). In observations classes, I found students aware of their identity. They wanted to show themselves as better as they could. Few students did not like to exhibit, they remained silent. Regarding identity, the findings of Torres et al. (2020) assert that identity is not formed in a day. It emerges through involvement in social activities and is informally constructed from the relationships with teachers, friends, and other social members.

Moreover, Ellsworth (1989) concerns about the identity of individual who are affected by self-doubt regarding their abilities, loosen their efforts or terminate their attempts. However, the findings of the study show that students with self-doubt also put efforts. They did not terminate the attempts. They reported that their failure taught them for the further success. So, their identities are not slacken as claimed by Bandura.

Furthermore, the findings resonate with the ideas of Martin (2004), who asserts that individuals are autonomous when they are moved by desires, beliefs, values, and attitudes. He further clarifies that being autonomous demands a person's ability and disposition to know their will. They also need to know which beliefs and desires affect relationships and self-conception. Thus, the autonomous students know the aspects of their self-identity on which they depend. When students have self-perception and autonomy, they deliver effective tasks. It happens because making a choice provides an opportunity to show their preferences and, to express their internal attributes, to assert one's autonomy (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). On the other hand, autonomy is not limited to self or independent entity rather it is assumed from external inputs and inducements (Ryan & Deci, 2006). External inputs such as teachers' supports, peer support, and involvement in group activities help to shape autonomy of an individual student.

In conclusion, identity, self-perception, and autonomy are interrelated and have dominant role in exercising student agency. Juutilainen et al. (2024) believe that agency is regarded as interwoven in teachers' and student teachers' identity negotiations. This identity brings self-perception. The self-perception gives strength to be autonomous. Exercising autonomy means anchoring student voices in classroom and beyond. Finally, autonomy facilitates promoting choice, reducing pressure to act

out tasks in a certain way. They are free to adopt their critical perceptions to perform the tasks.

Summary Chapter

This chapter provides a descriptive discussion of the findings based on the themes emerged from the data while making the result. The chapter tries to present a succinct discussion of the findings from each theme mentioned in the findings. The discussion has not been limited but revolves around main thrust of the research questions align with purposes. The discussed themes and sub-themes have highlighted the application of critical pedagogy and the empowerment of student agency, particularly within EFL classrooms. Through an in-depth analysis, I have linked and contrasted the findings with existing literature, previous research, and relevant theoretical frameworks, providing a comprehensive discussion. This comparative approach ensures that the study is well-grounded in academic discourse, validating the findings while also identifying gaps and areas for further inquiry. By drawing upon established theories and empirical studies, the discussion provides a comprehensive understanding of how critical pedagogy influences student agency in real classroom settings. This critical engagement has not only reinforced the study's key arguments but also paved the way for drawing meaningful conclusions and implications, offering insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers on fostering student empowerment and transformative learning practices through critical pedagogy.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions and Implications

The study primarily aimed to explore how students experience being empowered to the dimensions and aspects of SA and to examine how the practices of critical pedagogy contribute to fostering SA. The understanding gained from the study has led to the following conclusions relevant to higher education context.

First, the findings of the study reveal that students with high agency actively take responsibility for their own learning, exhibiting greater engagement, motivation, and critical thinking in language learning classrooms. When granted autonomy to question, analyze, and reflect, they not only improved in critical thinking but also showed enhanced metacognitive development—marked by increased self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-regulation. These findings affirm that fostering student agency through critical pedagogy empowers learners to become reflective, autonomous, and active participants in their learning process.

Second, students' beliefs on their abilities, considerably influenced their engagement and perseverance in developing speaking and writing skills. Relatedly, their positionality helped them navigate and influence their learning experiences efficiently involving in their roles and identities. However, the experiences of participants reveal a lack of student-centered instructional practices, such as open discussions, inquiry-based learning, and collaborative activities, along with insufficient motivation, which are essential for fostering critical thinking skills and student agency.

Third, the findings indicate that enhancement of student agency was possible through critical pedagogy applying the techniques such as open discussions, think-pair-share, student-led discussions, flipped classroom, and project-based learning

which empower students' agency through speaking and writing skills. However, the experiences of participants show that there were inadequate practices and motivation required for enhancing critical thinking ability and the agency of students in the classrooms.

This study expands understanding of fostering student agency in EFL classroom through the effective implementation of critical pedagogy. The findings have important implications for teachers, encouraging them to adopt this framework to empower students to critically examine social structures and actively engage in transformation through dialogue, reflection, and language-based actions.

This empowerment fosters a more dynamic and engaging learning environment, promoting higher levels of students' involvement and motivation. Therefore, from the findings, it is inferred that the classrooms environment, teachers, motivation, curriculum, and students are responsible factors for the development of student agency through the practice of critical pedagogy. The study highlights the need for flexible, student-centered, and self-reflective learning designs to effectively foster student agency.

Limitations

In reflecting on the completion of my dissertation, I encountered several limitations that influenced various aspects of the research process. These limitations related to the research topic, clarity of study objectives, selection of supporting theories, research design, contextual factors, the complex nature of the phenomenon under investigation, selection of research sites, sampling considerations, and data collection procedures. While limited to a single institution, the study provides insights into how critical pedagogy fosters learner agency in EFL contexts. Despite the substantial findings, it is significant to recognize the limitation of this study, including

the specific cultural, and educational contexts of the participants. I have noticed the following limitations.

First, number of participants were limited. I selected a small number of participants from a higher education institution. I applied purposive sampling technique to find potential participants with certain traits. I took six students studying in bachelor's degree and two teachers teaching in the same level for the interviews. Besides, I purposively selected other two teachers to observe their classes for the propose of ethnographic information relating to the practice of critical pedagogy in classrooms. Thus, the participants of the study do not represent population, only give perspectives. Therefore, the findings of the research are not generalizable.

Second, the study was confined to the exploration on the personal, relational, and participatory aspects of student agency and limited practices of critical pedagogy framework in EFL classrooms of tertiary level. I limited the study to the practice of critical pedagogy for the empowerment of student agency. Thus, the findings cannot provide clear conception of the use of either student agency or critical pedagogy in the classrooms separately.

Third, the interviews were made to elicit the lived experiences of participants regarding the practice of student agency in their classrooms and beyond. Next, I used limited theories of agency and critical pedagogy to determine the scope and boundaries of the study.

Fourth, one issue that remains a little under-discussed in the thesis in general is the spinoff of open discussions, student-led discussions, project-based learning, and collaborative and peer work on English language learning. Due to the scope of the study, I couldn't delve deeply into their impact on English language acquisition. However, I did observe that when students engaged in these modes of learning, their

communicative competence, critical language use, and vocabulary development showed subtle but meaningful improvements. While this study did not examine those aspects in depth, they remain promising areas for future research, particularly in multilingual and English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) settings.

Finally, as an ethnographer, I observed EFL classroom activities for over a year, but only noted 31 classes at random. To gather findings on critical pedagogical aspects, I conducted the class observations of other two teachers to see the interventions or use of the critical pedagogy framework both before and during the observation period to transform the classrooms into critical pedagogy spaces for empowering student agency. Finally, another limitation of this study is that it focused on a limited range of critical pedagogy approaches used by the teachers, while other potential strategies for intervention remain unexamined and warrant future investigations.

Implications

The findings of the study have several important implications for theory, practice, and policy. At the theoretical level, this study enriches the concept of student agency by situating it in Nepali higher education context. The study contributes to agency theory by illustrating how teacher support and institutional culture shape student agency in a non-Western higher education context. The findings theoretically suggest for the implementation of learner-centric strategies that promote student agency and critical thinking skills which are helpful to improve overall capacity of the students.

Practically, the findings suggest a need for professional development programs or trainings that prepare teachers to adopt more facilitative roles in fostering student autonomy and critical thinking ability. Additionally, integrating student-

centric learning approaches with critical pedagogy framework is pivotal to focus and foster student agency by aligning with their understandings, beliefs, interests, preferences, and metacognitive abilities.

In policy level, the study highlights the importance of integrating critical pedagogy into national higher education policy to promote equitable and student-centered learning environments. As there is a critical need for classroom engagement and activities to encourage agentic behaviors among students, teacher and peer supports are also important factors to consider. This study enabled teachers to identify essential strategies to link engagement and activities, thereby enhancing agency in both classroom and social contexts. Teachers and students at higher levels can gain insights into promoting practices that boost student agency and critical thinking ability.

Furthermore, the findings shed the light to the aspect of critical pedagogy which could be promoted through collaborative learning, self-directed learning, questioning, reflection, and feedbacks using open discussions, think-pair-share technique, open mike discussions, task-based learning, flipped classroom, etc. Teachers need to consider carefully on the aspects of curriculum, pedagogy, institutional culture and environment, teachers' support, and relationships while using these approaches. These aspects are helpful to educators, teachers, and policymakers to address the issues in classroom, curriculum, and contents.

To sum up, this study contributes to a better understanding of maximum utilization of classrooms to enhance student agency and critical thinking through learner-centric approaches. So that, the students of higher education can utilize their capacities in broader social contexts in their practical life. Its findings can significantly impact the area of using pedagogical approaches concerning to the issues

of student agency and critical pedagogy, paving the way for more effective and informed practices of those issues in specific contexts. Future research may explore these dynamics in different institutional settings and with larger participant groups.

Further Research

The limitations of the study suggest for the necessity of further research. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, including the relatively small sample size and the specific context of the participants. This limitation suggests that further research is needed to explore the applicability of my findings in different educational settings and with more diverse student or teacher populations and settings.

Similarly, to strengthen my findings, future research should focus on longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of student agency and critical pedagogy on language acquisition. Additionally, investigating the specific strategies that most effectively foster student agency in various EFL contexts could provide deeper insights into the best practices for language educators.

Next, through this study, I have demonstrated the potential of learner-centric approaches to transform EFL education, paving the way for more innovative and impactful teaching practices. So, further research can be made to investigate the impact of learner-centric approaches in boosting agency and critical thinking ability among students.

Although this thesis focuses on student agency within critical pedagogical practices, it is worth noting that such approaches—including open discussions, project-based learning, think-pare-share, and peer collaboration also contribute to students' English language development in a specific skill. This remains an area for future exploration, particularly in contexts where English is both a subject and a medium of

empowerment. Additionally, student agency as a central aspect of the research limited its scope in classroom activities, engagements, and participations. However, further study can broaden the scope of area to the outer activities of students such as their daily social and professional life.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of fostering student agency implementing critical pedagogy in EFL classrooms. By acknowledging the limitations and suggesting areas for future research, researchers can continue to build on these findings and further enhance the effectiveness of EFL education through learner-centric approaches.

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Appendix A: Consent Paper
Graduate School of Education
Tribhuvan University, Kritipur, Nepal

Consent to Participate in Research: Students

Title of Study: Student Agency in EFL Context: Practices of Empowerment Through Critical Pedagogy

Investigator: Devi Prasad Adhikari

Supervisor: Associate Prof. Gopal Prasad Pande, PhD

Dear Mr./Ms.

I am a doctoral candidate of Graduate School of Education at Tribhuvan University and presently conducting a research study as a part of the requirements for Doctoral Program in English Education. Specifically, I am collecting data under the supervision of Associate Prof. Gopal Prasad Pandey, PhD at Tribhuvan University.

The proposed phenomenological ethnography will mainly investigate the ‘lived experiences’ of teachers and students regarding the practice of student agency and critical pedagogy in EFL classrooms and also seeks to understand how the lived experiences of teachers on critical pedagogy contribute to students’ agency making and enhancing critical thinking capacity of students.

I anticipate that the data collection and findings from this research will add to the existing literature and provide implications and recommendations for future practice of student agency and critical pedagogy.

Data recorded from these discussions will be collected, coded, and analyzed to identify the outcomes of the lived experience of teachers and students student agency with in critical pedagogy.

Confidentiality:

I request permission from each participant. To protect the identity of each student who participates in this study, a pseudo name will be assigned.

I will only be involved in transcribing and coding all the data in order to conceal participant identities and ensure confidentiality.

Compensation : No compensation.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: The participant can withdraw from the research study at any time.

Consent : Your signature below indicates that you have agreed to volunteer as a research informant, that you understand your rights for withdrawal, and that you will notify the investigator in advance if you are unable to participate for any reason.

_____	Participant's Signature	_____	Date
_____	Investigator's Signature	_____	Date
_____	Supervisor's Signature	_____	Date

Appendix B: Consent Paper
Graduate School of Education
Tribhuvan University, Kritipur, Nepal

Consent to Participate in Research: Teachers

Title of Study: Student Agency in EFL Context: Practices of Empowerment Through Critical Pedagogy

Investigator: Devi Prasad Adhikari

Supervisor: Associate Prof. Gopal Prasad Pandey, PhD

Dear Mr./Ms.

I am a doctoral candidate of Graduate School of Education at Tribhuvan University and presently conducting a research study as a part of the requirements for Doctoral Program in English Education. Specifically, I am collecting data under the supervision of Dr. Gopal Prasad Pandey, Associate Professor at Tribhuvan University.

The proposed phenomenological ethnography will mainly investigate the ‘lived experiences’ of teachers and students regarding the practice of student agency within critical pedagogy in EFL classrooms and also seeks to understand how the lived experiences of teachers on critical pedagogy contribute to students’ agency making and enhancing critical thinking capacity of students

I anticipate that the data collection and findings from this research will add to the existing literature and provide implications and recommendations for future practice of student agency and critical pedagogy.

Data recorded from these discussions will be collected, coded, and analyzed to identify the outcomes of the lived experience of teachers and students’ student agency with in critical pedagogy.

Confidentiality:

I request permission from each participant. To protect the identity of each teacher who participates in this study, a pseudo name will be assigned.

I will only be involved in transcribing and coding all the data in order to conceal participant identities and ensure confidentiality.

Compensation : No compensation.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw: The participant can withdraw from the research study at any time.

Consent : Your signature below indicates that you have agreed to volunteer as a research informant, that you understand your rights for withdrawal, and that you will notify the investigator in advance if you are unable to participate for any reason.

_____	Participant's Signature	_____	Date
_____	Investigator's Signature	_____	Date
_____	Supervisor's Signature	_____	Date

Appendix C: Consent Paper
Graduate School of Education
Tribhuvan University, Kritipur, Nepal

Consent to Collect Data and Use as a Research Site

Title of Study: Student Agency in EFL Context: Practices of Empowerment Through Critical Pedagogy

Investigator: Devi Prasad Adhikari

Supervisor: Associate Prof. Dr. Gopal Prasad Pande

Dear Mr./Ms.

I am a doctoral candidate of Graduate School of Education at Tribhuvan University and presently conducting a research study as a part of the requirements for Doctoral Program in English Education. Specifically, I am collecting data under the supervision of Associate Prof. Gopal Prasad Pandey, PhD at Tribhuvan University.

The proposed phenomenological ethnography will mainly investigate the practices and 'lived experiences' of teachers and students regarding student agency and critical pedagogy in EFL classrooms and also seeks to understand how the lived experiences of teachers on critical pedagogy contribute to students' agency making and enhancing critical thinking capacity of students.

I anticipate that the data collection and findings from this research will add to the existing literature and provide implications and recommendations for future practice of student agency and critical pedagogy.

Data from interviews, field notes, observations and document analysis will be collected, coded, and analyzed to identify mainly the practices of student agency and critical pedagogy in EFL classroom.

I have chosen this campus as a research site because of my long time involvement in teaching English as a Foreign Language. It will be more convenient and supportive to me to involve in this institution in the process of prolonged data collection.

Confidentiality:

I request permission from the campus administration to collect data from the required classes, students and teachers. To protect the identity of each participant who participates in this study, a pseudo name will be assigned.

I will be involved in transcribing and coding all the data in order to conceal participants' identities and ensure confidentiality.

Compensation: No compensation.

Consent : Your signature below indicates that you have agreed to volunteer as a research site, and that you will notify the investigator in advance if you have any issues regarding the collection of data.

_____	Campus Chief's Signature	_____	Date
_____	Investigator's Signature	_____	Date
_____	Supervisor's Signature	_____	Dat

Appendix D: Interview Guidelines

Graduate School of Education

Tribhuvan University, Kritipur, Nepal

**Title of Study: Student Agency in EFL Context: Practices of Empowerment
Through Critical Pedagogy**

Guiding Questions of Interviews for Students (Participants)

1. How does your teacher encourage you to think critically and question ideas in your English language classes? Can you share an example?
2. What have you experienced in your classrooms regarding the development of your capacity?
3. What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences being empowered in your classrooms?
4. Do your teachers listen your voices and choices? Do they acknowledge your involvements and efforts made in activities equally?
5. How do you see your role in the learning process? Do you feel you have the freedom to express your ideas and make decisions in the classroom?

Appendix E: Interview Guidelines

Graduate School of Education

Tribhuvan University, Kritipur, Nepal

Title of Study: Student Agency in EFL Context: Practices of Empowerment Through Critical Pedagogy

Guiding Questions of Interviews for Teachers (Participants)

1. How do you define student agency in your EFL classroom, and what strategies do you use to foster it?
2. In what ways do you incorporate critical pedagogy in your EFL teaching, and how does it impact students' ability to think critically and act independently?
3. Can you share an example of a classroom activity or experience where students demonstrated agency as a result of critical pedagogy practices?
4. How do you see your role in the learning process? Do you feel you have given the freedom to your students to express their ideas and make decisions in the classrooms?
5. What challenges do you face in empowering students through critical pedagogy, and how do you address them?

Appendix F: Observation Protocol

Each participant (teacher) will facilitate a learning activity that they believe is designed to:

- affirm and honour students' identities,
- challenge them to think critically about what they are learning,
- think critically about the issues put in the class by teachers

Based on the participants' preferences, observations can either be in person, or can be recorded and shared with the researcher. The lesson or learning activity will be 50-60 minutes in length (or longer if requested by the participant). The participant will determine whether the entire lesson or a portion of the lesson or activity will be observed. If a portion of the lesson is to be observed, the participant will determine which portion will be observed. The observation will be audio- recorded.

During the observation, the researcher will take notes on his notebook. The notes will focus on:

- the teachers'(participants) instructions, pedagogy, techniques,
- the students' actions throughout the learning activity,
- how the students respond to those actions, and
- the overall state of the classroom, including a physical description of how the seats, are arranged, how do students communicate, collaborate and so forth

After observation the researcher will:

- prepares reflection note following each observation,
- have reflective talk on the class observed, and
- collaborate with the participants for the execution of critical pedagogy framework.

Appendix G: Interview Samples

First Interview with S1

(22 July, 2023)

R: Did you start school from grade one or before this?

S1: I started from *sishu* class.

R: What sort of relation did you have with your teachers at your school level?

S1: I had very fearful relation with teachers at the beginning. I did not know why this happened. It continued till college level. I could not be closed with many teachers even at campus level.

R: Do you still feel fear to ask question to your teachers?

S1: Yes, I still find difficult to interact with many teachers. I could not speak with them freely. However, there a few teachers whom I could tell anything freely. I can be close to them. I can share anything I like. But they are very few.

R: You have five six teachers in a day teaching in this level. Do you afraid to them all?

S1: I almost feel hesitation to talk to them, to share with them. Its may be due to fear.

R: Why do you think it happens even to the students of higher level?

S1: There are many teachers who do not like listen every student. They do not pay attention to all of us. They only consider some talkative and talent students in the class. They only take their names, listen to them, and respond them. There are teachers who never paid attention to me. They taught me for three/four years, but they don't openly talk to me.

R: Why it happens? Are you an introvert or silent? May be this reason the teachers do not pay attention to you.

S1: I m a little silent student. I do not talk in the class. Teachers only catch with talkative students.

R: Did not you ever feel teachers give priority to you?

S1: In class they pay more attention to talkative and talent students. Not to me.

R: How do you feel when your teachers do not pay you attention?

S1: We similar friends usually talk about this. We doubt why our teachers do not talk to us. We evaluate the teachers. Why some teachers pay attention to us and every silent student? Why other teachers do not pay attention? We friends had suffocation to think about this.

R: How did you express you feeling in that case?

P1: I usually wrote my feeling when I chocked. Many times, I wanted to post in face book, but I could not. I waited for a day keeping the draft. I thought that the teachers would be angry. Most of the time, I kept the feeling unpublished and inside me because of fear. I had a lot of fear in first posting. But I posted.

When I posted my friends supported me. (This was a phenomenon)

R: How did you feel after posting and getting support from your friends?

S1: I had a little fear but later I avoided it. I felt happy. I thought that those teachers might have seen it. I guessed those teachers would tell me something reacting my post, but they did not. Then after I took easily.

R: It means silent students want to express their feeling out of the class may be using any media or expressing to their friends?

S1: Yes, I think so. I did also. I chose this because I wanted to release myself and wanted to notify the teachers those who did not hear me in classroom.

R: It means every student want to speak and put their voices, but teachers are not considering them. Is it?

S1: Sure, I have many experiences regarding this. When we respond to teachers' questions, they do not fully support our response. But when some other students respond they easily accept their answer. The teachers do not agree fully on our answers.

R: You mean? Every student like to speak but every teacher is not ready to listen all.

S1: I have some depressing moments in classrooms. When I answered to the teachers, they never showed satisfaction. I knew that was the answer, but they always fully accepted whatever the talented students said. At that time, I became so sad and depressing. I had one another example. Our teacher agreed on the wrong answer of talented ones, but they did not agree on my answer which was correct. (in multiple choice item). See what happened at that moment to us! (Surprising mood)
(phenomenon)

R: How did you manage or minimize this feeling of suppression and discrimination?

S1: I was sure that those teachers would not check our answers in final exam. So, I did not need to worry more about their negligence. I tried to keep myself satisfied/happy.

R: Did you ever feel not to take or discontinuous their classes?

S1: Umm. I felt. I also had feeling that I did not understand their class. They never asks me and never trusts on my answer. They never listened to me. So, I wanted to be silent. I thought there was no value of me there.

R: What about other friends? What have they felt? How did they share with you?

S1: We talked a lot about the teachers. We wanted to tell our aggression or complain to the teachers, but we never could. We just shared among friends and scolded the teachers. We murmured to them.

R: Did not you want to tell the teacher about this since you had the majority in the class?

S1: Why not? We wanted a lot, but we could not say. We wanted to bunk the class, but we had some other good teachers not to avoid them in between. I always avoided the last period teacher when I did not like him.

R: Why some students speak a lot and more other do not do the same in the class? Are there other causes?

S1: We many students represent rural life. We have not been taught in this way. Our culture also did not teach to be more talkative to our teachers. Few students come from cities and urban schools. They have habit and culture to discuss with their teachers. I'm from the very low educational and economic background so that I could not speak when I want. I was taught not to speak with the seniors. May be its my problem. Later my friends encouraged me speak and write my voices.

R: How often did you find chances to talk about any other issues in your class other than core courses?

S1: We get rare chances in higher classes. Many teachers only teach and discuss on topics given in the syllabus. Very few teachers bring social issues and other matters in classroom besides their courses. So, we have very less chance to present our opinions and creativity in classrooms. However, one two teachers provide us equal chances to present all student views and creations. I have one example. I was very quiet student those days in the class. My teacher noticed me and other silent students. He encouraged me to talk and present if I had any creation. It was a good Friday celebration. He requested me so I presented one *gajal*. He appreciated me and suggested me some words to change and add. I was so happy to him. He continuously encouraged me to write more. I wrote many and recited in the classroom in his period.

I started to write poems, essays, and stories. He motivated me by giving feedbacks every time and chances to present. I am happy to him. I liked his class. I don't like to miss his class. Other students also liked his class very much. We all could express anything we liked in his classes. It was fun, interesting, exciting because it used to be participatory class. Sometimes we felt it was not a classroom it was like some different forum to discuss openly of our interest. (she seems excited) Looking his class and his idea of participatory pedagogy I thought to be a teacher like him. Now a days as a teacher I'm following his ideas in my classrooms.

R: Do you have any phenomenon (event/sensation/thought/ emotion) that your teachers do not agree your response or answer?

S1: There are many events. When weak students presented their answer to the teachers, they did not believe us. They never believed on our answer even if it was correct. Once I presented correct answer to an objective question, my teacher did not agree on my answer. He supported the answer of top student. I knew that the answer was incorrect. This event helped to lose confident on me. I was sad.

R: How did you manage this emotion?

S1: I had the hope that my answers would be checked by not my teachers but other teachers in final exam. So, it wouldn't happen.

R: What was your next reaction to those teachers?

S1: I did not take part in his class actively. I wanted to remain silent. Sometimes I do not like to be in his class.

R: What about other students?

S1: In their classes only very, few students spoke. They controlled the class. We remained silent.

R: What is your impression to the class of those teachers who are positive and create engaging environment in classroom?

S1: I find their classroom good and participatory. We easily understood the matter. When they provided us chances every time to everybody, we learnt ourselves. We easily understood. Nothing was difficult for us.

R: As a teacher now, are you using these good practices to your classrooms?

S1: Off course. I'm doing in my classroom getting ideas from him. I also suggest juniors to be positive and supportive to our students and family members to boost up their potentials.

R: In higher education classes, teachers should listen students and ask them to present their views and opinions. Do you prefer this?

S1: Yes, it must be. I knew it is necessary from my own experiences in higher classes. Teachers must be open, positive, and supportive. They must listen and appreciate every student' voices.

R: In your four years bachelor studies, what is your observation? Were there large number of teachers who did not listen and response all students? Or they were few?

S1: My experience showed that there were many teachers who did not listen and response to all students. Only two teachers fell in the category of good teachers for me. They were good because they every time were ready to listen and response all the students in the classroom. Other teachers just listened some top students and talkative ones. This ultimately hamperd our learning.

Due to this reality, many times I did not like to attend their classes.

R: From the classroom you also learnt that teachers and students should be connected mutually to improve learning capacity of every student.

S1: Exactly, teacher and students should have mutual relationship. This is possible through teachers. When teachers let their students participate equally in all activities and discussions, students obviously get benefitted in learning. It helps to enhance students' capacity in learning.

R: What are the benefits or advantages for students?

S1: We got many benefits. We were encouraged by his suggestions. He openly and heartily helped us in activities and engagements. This made us easy and happy to do more.

R: Instead of this, how did you take cases of other type of teachers?

S1: Let me share one feeling. When those teachers end the class, I felt relaxed, at least this class had been finished. I felt it was always longer and boring. So, when the teacher finished his class, we got freedom. Otherwise, we felt we were bounded.

**First Interview with S4
(February 02, 2024)**

Researcher gives background and describes about the ethical issues.

R: When did you start your class as a student?

S4: From four years starting from Nursery.

R: As you have long experiences of classroom (nearly two decades). What sort of classroom is interesting for you?

S4: Student-centered class is interesting. Giving priority to students by teachers. Teachers as only facilitator.

R: Do you have such student-centered classroom experiences?

S4: Yes, some of our teachers used games to make our class interesting. We were excited to take part in games. We learnt easily by doing.

R: In your experience, why do you think some classes are not interesting?

S4: When teacher play dominant role, classrooms are not interesting. When they follow traditional pedagogies, when they do not use technologies. if teachers do not follow contemporary/social issues or do not go with time.

R: How can a teacher connect contemporary issues to their courses?

S4: Asking every student what is going on in their periphery and bringing the issues in classroom discussion.

R: Are there experiences that you did not like to attend classes?

S4: Yes.

R: Why? What are the causes of leaving class?

S4: Some teachers came in class without enough preparation. They could not satisfy us. At that time, we wanted to leave the class. They also could not connect social issues in their teaching. We were not motivated.

R: It means a prepared teachers can motivate students?

S4: Umm...(pause). He can give more examples, can explains more, can satisfy us.

R: Do teachers need to deal contemporary issues in classroom?

S4: Yea. It is needed to make class interesting. When the classroom is interesting, students like to involve in activities. They can increase their ability.

R: Do teachers need to create activities in classroom?

S4: Yes sir.

R: What benefits do students get from classroom activities?

S4: Students can increase their learning capacity, leadership, and adaptation with friends. When I involve in activities it is easy to understand topic and matter fast. From activities I can enhance my ability in doing social activities. I can develop writing and speaking skills in English.

R: What benefits do engagement provide to you in your experiences?

S4: I become aware for learning in time from engagements. It increases competitiveness. When some friends do or complete given tasks faster, we also want to do fast. It also benefits to engage in external social works. After I learn in classroom, I also can do it out of class.

S4: What benefits do you take from project works?

R: I go in fields; I go out of the course. I am connected to the people in society. I know about the society. I learn many things from the field. It enhances our communication skills.

R: How can teachers motivate you for developing learning habit out of teaching course?

S4: Teachers can show documentaries, films, videos. Some of our teachers used to do like this. So, their class were more interesting. We got chances to learn many things out of course which is useful for social life.

R: In your classrooms, do teachers give priority to all students equally?

S4: No sir. Some teachers called only few names in classroom. They have no equal treatment. They favour some students.

R: How did you feel when teacher do not call your name?

S4: I am personally demotivated. When teachers call only one or two students names time and often in classroom, it really depressed me. We friends used to talk about this. But we never said to teachers. I think a teacher should not do this. Many students feel jealous. I sometimes did not like to attend the class of those teachers.

R: How you felt at the time when your teacher discriminates?

S4: I feel harass. I do not like to listen the teacher interestingly. It becomes boring. I expected that the class would end soon. I felt it was very long class.

R: Are there any evidence that your teachers discriminated among students?

S4: Why not. I have some evidence. Once my teacher gave different marks to me and my friend. We had written same. There was no difference in our writings, but he allowed five marks for her and three marks for me. It was discrimination in giving marks. There are other evidence of injustice.

R: Any evidence of injustice in your experiences?

S4: Teachers gave more chances to few students to speak, to present. Many of us had to remain silent, just listening to them. Very few chances came to me. Some teachers never asked to other weak students.

R: How did you feel at that time?

S4: I felt it was a biasness, in justice. I felt demotivation.

R: Was there any effect in your performance due to teacher's biasness?

S4: Yes, it did. I thought that how hard I did this teacher did not give me good marks. So, I did not like to work hard in his subject. I then became weak in my performances.

R: What factors influences the selecting your learning goals?

S4: Family, friends, teachers, parents, brothers, and sisters influenced me to set learning goals.

R: How have you achieved the learning goals?

S4: Thinking that many people have influenced me. I worked hard due to their influence. My family always helped to achieve.

R: Have you developed confidence after achieving goals?

S4: Yes. I developed sir. With that confidence, I can express many things in outer worlds. That is main thing in learning. We can apply what we learn in society.

R: Have you found peer support in your classrooms?

S4: I have got a lot. When I was absent, they helped me sharing notes and ideas. I have learnt many things from peers. I feel easier to learn from them.

R: Is there difference having peer's support and learning self in achievement?

S4: Yes sir, Peer's support is helpful in enhancing personal capacity and achieving learning goals. I am good in one subject. I can share in this subject. My peer is good in another subject she can share me. It's much fruitful.

R: Is there any example of peers sharing which helped you to achieve?

S4: Yes sir, in my B. Ed. first year I was weak in linguistics subject. My friends helped me. They taught me. I got many helps. So, I could pass easily. Otherwise, I could not have passed that subject. We used a WhatsApp group to share. It increased our speaking skill in English.

R: What experiences do you have in group works?

S4: I already said I passed linguistics subject because of group works. I did not have ideas in many topics. They taught me. I easily understood. Some topics I did not understand when our subject teacher taught but I understood from my friends.

R: Did your teacher hear your voice in classroom?

S4: Yes, they listened to me.

R: Did your teachers listen your choices and wonders in the classroom?

S4: Sometimes. Few teachers always listened to us, gave chances to us. However, some teacher did not like this. They just came in class, gave lectures, and finished their courses. They have no concern to students' choices.

R: What effect did you have when your teachers did not listen your choices?

S4: I did not like to ask again. I did not like to be active. I just became passive listener.

R: Could you have activities or events as you wish?

S4: Yes, sometimes we celebrated some occasions ourselves. Not all teachers but some listened to us and gave us chance to do what we liked. We celebrated Good

Fridays, Martyrs Days, Christmas Days, etc. At that day we could present our creations. We could share each other's feelings, ideas, and opinions. We promoted our presentation skills and creation habits. For e.g., sometimes we demonstrated interviews in the class. It helped us to conduct interviews for doing research.

R: How do this type of celebrations help to weak learners/students?

S4: For those who are weak in learning can get unimaginable chances to excel their ideas, skills, and creations among others. They remained silent in time of teaching course of study but took part actively in such celebrations. They learnt new vocabularies. They learnt to recite the poems, sing songs. Their shyness decreased; confidence increased. They are socially active and involved.

R: Do you have any example in your change in performance from such activities?

S4: Yes. I was shy in the beginning. I did not use to take part. When my teachers and friends requested me to take part in activities I did. I have one example. When our campus conducted workshop at first, I just became volunteer in the workshop. Next year, I was an active participant of the workshop. After two years, I became one of the presenters in the workshop. Now, I have confidence that I could present in other workshops.

R: To be the presenter how did your teachers and peers help?

S4: Yes. Teachers and peers always encouraged me. They said, "... you can do. ... you can do. You have skills to present". I was not ready myself. However, teachers' and peers' support and encouragement pushed me do. I took part in workshops. It helped me develop skills of presentation. I trembled in first time. Now a days I can present easily.

R: What do your teachers do to motivate equally without biasness to all students?

S4: I have not seen all teachers motivating all students equally. Some teachers have students of their choice.

R: How can teachers do that?

S4: Teachers visit each student individually in their seat. They should equally provide chances. They should take everybody's name. They should care everybody.

R: How do your teachers address individual differences or multiple talents of students?

S4: Some students can understand in one explanation of teacher. They have no problems. Many students do not have this capacity. At that time, teachers repeatedly tell them until they understand. They give extra time and effort to them.

R: Do you have any instance when you felt empowered to learning by your teachers and peers?

S4: I have not experienced of being empowered by an individual teacher. They always said you must study. You must do well. But did not give individual attention to me.

R: If your capacity or agency is developed, does it enhance to your further studies?

S4: Yes. It will surely help. I can use the things I have. If I am fully prepared now, I shall enhance my further studies. Preparing now means getting necessary chances to empower myself.

R: According to your learning experience, let's explore two things. In one teacher who explore our capacity and choices and so accordingly. The other one just come in class and go in his one way. What are the differences between these two teachers?

S4: The first one is better to enhance achievements. The teachers who teach exploring the capacity of students are very good. Their teaching can be remembered for long

time. But the teachers who never care about our ability cannot develop the capacity of the learners.

R: Do you take ownership of your learning achievement? How do you take?

S4: Yes. I take ownership of my learning achievement myself by self-learning, involving in activities, engagements. Giving time.

R: Can you alone achieve without peers and teachers help? Share your experiences.

S4: No sir, I think when I do not know I must take help from my peers and teachers. When I am absent, I need friends' help to cover the topic. It is true that a student who regularly attends class and take part in every activity, keep engaged, follow teachers' advice can improve his ability to do better not only in exam but also in his further life. I have seen my friends who do not actively take support of teachers and friends cannot progress well, cannot develop capacity. Their achievement is low. They have low performance level. They cannot give ideas and expression in social life.

R: What a teacher can do to improve their overall performance?

S4: The teachers should understand students' individual capacity and interest to address their problems.

R: What are the factors that affect learners' overall achievements and capacity development?

S4: Teachers supports, peers, support, group works, peer works, extra activities, motivation, proper individual guidance, sharing experiences, etc. can affect learners' overall capacity.

R: How can a teacher connect course work to personal and social life of a learner?

S4: According to the issue or topics teachers must try to connect students' personal and social life. They can show the examples of their community. Such as child marriage. Teacher can share the story of victims of child marriage to go against it.

Second Interview with S6

(June 16, 2024)

R: How are classes going?

S1: It's okay, going well.

R: How is/was your classroom environment? What is your experience?

S6: Classroom is peaceful. There are not many students in our class. Academic environment of the campus is positive. I like to go to classes. Teachers and friends are supportive. Teachers take classes regularly. I do not want to leave the classes.

However, some teachers' classes are boring because of over lecturing. So, I want to avoid their classes.

R: You said some classes are boring. How have the long lecturing classes affected you?

S6: Some teachers' classes are boring because of over lecturing. So, I want to avoid their classes. There is no interactions, discussion, and activities in these classes. It effects in our achievement.

R: Do you present in your classes?

S6: Yes sir, sometimes.

R: What support do you get from your presentations?

S6: I'm not only student. I teach in a school. My presentations in campus have helped me to do good in my school. I built up confidence after each presentation. From my presentations I can understand and remember the contents.

R: How do you feel in interactive classes?

S6: It is very interesting and attractive. Our laziness is killed. We become active when we are in interactive classes.

R: In which situation/environment do you like to present?

S6: When I get topic of my own choice and enough support from teachers I like to present. I repeatedly present.

R: Have presentations improved your ability?

S1: Of course. When I get chance to present in class my confidence increases. I can remember the presented issues. I can openly talk to others.

R: How does the classroom or campus culture affect your learning?

S1: There is positive effect of the culture in my learning. Our campus has positive academic culture. It always focuses on students' learning and achievement. It has given us a sense of pride.

R: Do your curriculum give chance to spill your interest and choices? Is the curriculum flexible?

S6: In comparison to past level, this level has given us some freedom and choices. However, I want some courses like grammar and literature to improve our language as we are becoming language teacher. It is not possible from our curriculum.

R: Have your teachers given friendly environment for presentations?

S6: Yes, my teachers have given me friendly environment. They often give me chances. They support for choosing topics. However, all teachers do not give chance for presentations. They only present themselves.

R: Do you improve any skill of English language through presentations?

S6: Sure sir, I have improved my speaking and writing skills form my presentations.

R: Do you feel to quit your studies at some points? But you still have been continuously doing. What made you continue your hard works?

S6: Yes, this feeling comes sometimes. There was a long gap in my studies due to my home affairs. I want to be permanent secondary teacher and do PhD in my life. This interest drives to continue my study. It is my self-decision.

R: What factors have encouraged you to continue study or hard works?

S6: Mostly, I encourage myself, family, mother also motivate me to continue my study and work hard.

R: What supports do you get from the extra-curricular activities conducted in your class and campus?

S6: Extra-curricular activities help to find out interest and ability of each student. They can take part according to their choices. I like to take part in such activities. In my experience, ECA has helped to collaborate and understand each other among friends.

R: Do digital tools and AI tool support to enhance your learning?

S6: Digital tools and AI have supported us a lot. Students who are busy can get chance to use recordings of the classes in my free time. I am getting a lot of benefits from it.

R: Have got any positive effect from your journal writings or reflective writing?

S6: I do not write now a days. I used to write before. Reflective or journal writings helped to share my personal feelings and reactions. This habit gave me ideas of writing. I felt relief after writing.

R: How your family and society have helped in achieving your learning goal?

S6: I am mostly grown up by the support of family and seniors of my society in the field of academia. Listening their suggestions and following their paths I understood the importance of education. This helped in my learning goal.

R: What motives you more? Your inner-self or any other external sources?

S6: I was motivated by the external sources in my school life. Now, I am self-motivated. I believe myself and get motivated.

R: When you feel you just cannot read this topic, you want to quit it. But you continue. What makes you this?

S6: I mostly focus on examination. I practice a lot until I know. Sometimes, I felt I could not do, wanted to quit but my inner conscience told me to continue and get achievement how hard it was.

R: Have you experienced that your self-efficacy and self-reliance have affected to your achievements?

S6: I think my self-efficacy and self-reliance have helped in my achievements. However, I have got continuous support from family, friends, and teachers.

R: Are you pro-active students who wants to do work without other's efforts?

S6: Yes, I am active. I trust myself fully. So, I take initiatives myself. I do not wait for other's commands. I have a dream to go higher so I cannot wait for other's influence.

R: Has your confidence increased by writing?

S6: Sure. When I write journals and homework regularly, this improve my writing skill.

R: How do you feel when other give you feedback in your writings?

S6: I feel very happy. I believe I can get progress with their feedbacks. Positive feedback matters me. If insult is given in name of feedbacks I do not like this.

R: What sort of behavior of teachers and friends demotivate you?

S6: I hate their insulting habit. When my teachers' and friends' insult, dominate me, I am demotivated.

R: Do pedagogical approaches and teachers behaviors encourage students to achieve more?

S6: Pedagogical approaches affect students' understanding and achievement. My experiences show that interactive pedagogy and student-centric methods encourage

students to achieve. I like to listen attentively and take part in every activity which help me to achieve good scores in exams and learn something to apply in daily life.

R: Do your leadership role gain positive environment in classroom?

S6: When I take up chances actively, I become like leader. This leadership role increases confidence.

R: How do you take yourself when your teachers trust on your ability?

S6: When I get trust from teachers, I feel that I can do better than this. I feel more excited to do more. This helps to continue my efforts and achievements. I feel I should maintain this trust.

R: What benefits are you getting from the positive teachers or mentors who guide and give freedom?

S6: Sometimes teachers scold us that is good for our wrong habits. I put interest in positive teachers' guidance. I feel I remember more when I am guided by positive teachers.

R: When you gained small achievements like completing assignments, project works, passing exams, you teachers might complement you. At that time how do you feel?

S6: In time of small achievements, I feel happy. I like to see other friends' success in such small achievements. These small achievements give us the foundations for long term goals. Achievement in an assignment, a homework, and a class test provide us motivation for long term achievements. A small achievement in life and a single word in whole writing is like a complete longer achievement.

R: What benefits do you get from collaborative learning and student-centered teaching?

S6: The main benefit from collaborate learning is getting ideas from friends. I feel easier to keep in mind from the reading with discussion and sharing among friends and teachers.

R: You often overcome the challenges. Your challenges regarding family, personal health, and other social problems. How do you overcome these?

S6: Challenges are the parts of life. We must cross them. First, I make up mind to overcome it then I start acting. In my experience, I can overcome any challenge if I have confidence to cross it.

R: Have you measured your failure as a ladder of success?

S6: I had an experience in school level. I failed in English first time. It was the first term exam in class ten. I was so sad. It shocked me. But later in a final exam I got the highest mark with my dedication and hard work. I learnt from that failure.

R: Have you ever had the experiences of going against teachers' or friends' domination?

S6: Yes, I spoke against domination many times. I do not afraid when I have no mistakes. I raised voices against teachers' domination. One example, once my teacher dominated my friend who was far from technology. She could not submit her assignment in time due to lack of access to technology. At that time, I spoke against his domination. My friends also supported me.

R: Can you speak against any societal domination?

S6: Of course, sir, I can do it now. Many times, I have spoken against domination in society.

R: Have got any experience of your personal growth that you made?

S6: When life goes ahead, I automatically grow with many ups and downs. I try to adopt any situations and face any obstacles. I have achieved many times avoiding the obstacles.

R: Have you ever critically thought up on your own thinking?

S6: In later days, I have started looking critically on my own thoughts. It is necessary to change traditional thinking in this age. When I critically think over me, I get many new ideas and insights.

Second Interview with T2

(June 20, 2024)

R: In your experience, how is the classroom environment in your campus?

T: In terms of physical infrastructure many things are managed. Seating arrangement is traditional. However, there is the access of digital media and tools. Number of students is not crowded. So many things can be managed in classrooms. There is no unfavorable environment for learning.

R: Many students say there is still the tradition of over lecturing. What effects do you see among your students due to it?

T: Some of us are still following traditional teaching methods which is not preferable to students. Now, students do not have patience to listen long to their teachers. They have the habit of watching short videos in social media. They want to get much information from short video. Technology has changed students' mind set up. So, students are happy to engage in short activities of five ten minute rather than long lecturing. We think that 50 minutes time is ours, so we present long which is wrong.

R: How do you maintain equality and equity in students' presentations?

T: I request to all students. Everyone cannot and do not want to do. I generally make pairs of willing and non-willing students. So that most of them present.

R: In which environment do students present?

T: Students willingly present when we remark their efforts positively. When I support them with necessary materials and provide them ideas and models, they are ready to present. I also taught them helpful mobile apps for presentation. We should not only remark them negatively in mistakes. We must prepare them with positive mind set up.

R: Do students increase capacity from presentations?

T: Of course. When student search contents and materials themselves, they learn many things. After presenting their own preparations they are excited. I have seen many students who understood things well with their presentation. It was difficult for me to make them understood.

R: How is the academic culture in your campus?

T: There is not much sharing culture. I have made different virtual groups to share ideas and knowledge. Few students have this culture. We have problem of irregularity in class. We have tried to bring students in class by telephoning. We conduct different programs to create learning culture. However, we cannot make much favorable culture as we expected.

R: You are teaching M. Ed. and B. Ed. students. Do you think the curriculum you are teaching provide choices and interest of students? How flexible are they in your experience?

R: Curriculum are fixed and guided. I cannot change it as I like. I cannot be free because I must focus to examinations. Questions are asked in a rigid way. I cannot go out of curriculum what students demand. My students cannot express their choices and interest through the curriculum. If curriculum is flexible, we can include students' interest and need which will create favorable learning environment.

R: When students find your topic difficult, some students do it, but many want to quit.

Why it happens?

T: Students grow the culture of learning personality. All students do not attempt difficult issues or problems. They grow fear that they cannot do. But some students with their own efficacy they try, they do not give up. We teachers need to deal difficult issues in classroom to make easy. But I have seen the culture that teacher deals easy thing in class and ask students to do difficult thing in their home. I think this is not good culture. Students escape difficulties.

R: Do you give choices to students to present in class?

T: There is no 100% freedom of choice. I give them some topics. They choose out of these. Only few students choose their own topics.

R: What do your experience say about the extra-curricular activities? How does it enhance students' performance and learning ability?

T: Those who willingly take part in extra-curricular activities are enhancing their capacity. I have seen this. Many students who are employed now, were good in ECA. They learnt skills and ideas from ECA and apply in their job and daily life. They are doing good in personal and professional life.

R: In your experience, what kind of effect have you seen in students who have habit of writing reflection and journal?

T: Students are not practicing writing reflection. Very few students do this. I find them creative. They develop sense of consciousness, self-awareness. But this trend is not practiced by many students.

R: Are your students intrinsically motivated or extrinsically?

T: I find mostly intrinsic motivation. Students who are driven by their self are doing well.

R: Is not their role of extrinsic motivation?

T: Extrinsic motivation is also necessary. Students are driven by this also. I have seen both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation but intrinsic is more needed in higher level students.

R: Some students are pro-active and other are lazy. How do you give effort to activate lazy or passive students?

T: I try to be supportive to passive students. I often motivate them. I show them different motivational videos or materials. I counsel them. It's difficult to change their habit suddenly. It takes time. I give continuous efforts.

R: How do your students take your feedbacks?

T: This is a big problem. I did not find all students taking my feedbacks seriously. They did not correct and regenerate learning from the feedbacks. Mostly they even did not see the feedbacks. This is the lack. I am facing these challenges.

R: What sort of behavior of teachers demotivate students?

T: Teacher's behaviors affect students' motivation. When I do not inspire, motivate, and praise my students, they do not show interest next time. When I scold, blame and remark negatively they do not attempt next time. If I show my anger and aggressiveness, students do not show interest in doing what I give and do not listen to me.

R: Different teachers apply different pedagogical approaches. Do pedagogical practices of teachers affect students' learning achievements?

T: Pedagogy is one of the major factors that affect students' learning achievement. Traditional pedagogy prevents students from being active. Only teachers become active. Modern pedagogies help shape students' learning habit so it will finally have effect in their achievement.

R: Some students take up leadership role. What benefit do students take from this?

T: Leadership helps students to be active. They transform themselves from introvert to extrovert. Development of leadership gives them confidence and courage to learn and do new things.

R: Why do you trust your students?

T: I trust they have ability. They can do. If I trust them, they will feel free and confident themselves. They try to do in their own efforts. Being positive and trustworthy to students helps in motivation.

R: You give small tasks to students. They accomplish it. You might celebrate it. How do students take it or feel?

T: When students find their own product achieved. When teachers celebrate it, students get motivated. They become happy. These small achievements become the foundation to long term goals and achievements. This has significant role for further efforts. If students are not making small achievements, they are being demotivated.

R: In your experiences, how do your students respond in collaborative and student-centric teaching?

T: In collaborative learning, students learn from friends what they cannot learn from teachers. They can share things to their friends which they cannot do with teachers. In student-centric activities also all students do not take part. I need to give extra efforts to engage them. What I find is that those who are not good in subject matter are doing good if they take part in activities.

R: Everyone has problems. Some students having job, family, children are doing good. You see that they are having problems, but they are overcoming the challenges. How do you think it is possible?

T: Strength of overcoming the challenges truly depends on student's self-motivation, self-efforts, and dedication. Their trust to themselves is also a factor. I find some students are struggling hard. They are achieving good due to their dedication and self-efficacy. Their own motivation and teacher's motivation is also vital to them.

R: Your students might have failures. How do they take their failure?

T: This is a problem. They do not learn from failure. They think their failure is a crime. They hide failure. They think that teachers are not looking them positively due to failure. We need to change their thinking.

R: You share many things in the class. When your students are not satisfied with your arguments or do not agree on you, do they critically object you?

T: This is very rare case. Students easily say that they do not understand but they do not give critical arguments. In my class, I find few cases in which students disagree me and put their arguments critically. It's due to their lack of knowledge and fear. However, I always try to create the environment to be critical.

R: Do your students have habit of metacognitive practice?

T: They do not look their activities reflectively. They do not try to find out the reasons of unsuccess or weakness. Only a few students do this. They are quite successful.

R: What is the position of your students in social or personal life?

T: The students who were critical in classroom are taking good social roles. They are advocating in society. They raise voice against dominations. But my experience says quiet and passive students in the class are always quiet everywhere.

Appendix H: Samples of Class Observations/ Reflections

Classroom Observation: Day 9

(November 26, 2022)

Teacher: Prepare agenda (any five) for a meeting of your organization.

There were 16 students in the class. Teacher divided into 4 groups. He waited for five minutes. No group either said or wrote.

The teacher tried to convince them. Some students said, "I Can't do sir". Other remained silent.

The teacher continued convincing them to do whatever they can. Teacher said, "Do please what you know. It's not difficult. Think for a while and write whatever comes in your mind. It is not necessary you must do correct. Talk in your group". Share your ideas.

They thought for a while, discussed in group, and started writing. Two students from two groups wrote five agenda.

S1 said, "Sir nothing come to my mind what to write" (*aaudaina aaudaina k lekhnu*)

The teacher said, "You can do well. See others what they have done. You will have ideas to make new".

S1 went to other groups to look other's ideas. Finally, S1 from one of the groups made five agenda which were relevant.

Group members presented one/one agenda.

Classroom Observation: Day 14

(Open Discussion Day)

Teacher declared this as an open discussion day.

S1: Why do not teachers listen to us? Why do not listen anything?

(*sir hamile vaneko teachers le kina mandaina? kehi sundaina kina?*)

S4: I feel bored. They do not listen to us (*Tei ta malai ni jhyau lagchha. hamro kuro ta sunnuhunna*).

Teacher: Do all teachers listen you?

S1: No sir. Only few listen to us.

Teacher: Why do you think they do not listen their students?

S1: We are asking the same. You are pretending (*tei ta sodhi ra xau. sir pani nabujeko jasto garnu hunchha*).

S4: When we cannot answer teachers teach us. But when we ask for doing some favors, they do not listen. We cannot put our interest (*Question soddda ra vanna nasakda chai anek billa hanne. ani hamile yeso garau bhanda chai nasunne. aafno kuro ta rakhnai painna.*)

Teacher: Do other feel the same?

S3 and S2: Yes, sir we feel the same.

S4/S5: Yes, sir Yes.

Teacher: What about me?

S1: You always give us chance to speak. You are allowing us for open discussion. So we can say everything to you. We are not afraid.

S3: Other teachers do not listen to us and do not allow us to question them. However, you are not like them. We can talk a lot with you.

Other students: yes sir. Our voice is not listened, so we do not like to speak in class.

Reflection of Classroom Observation: Day 12

Students did the work when teacher did not much pressurize. Asking in positive tone helped encourage students do the works. I have found that students changed due to the pressure and positive interventions of the teachers.

Once OT2 asked some students to talk on 'Nelson Mandela' and his political activities. No student showed interest. When he asked to talk about the leader from Nepal, all 19 students put their views. It means students show interest to talk about the issues related to their contexts and interests.

Reflection of Classroom Observation: Day 26

Teachers do not know everything. They might forget some ideas. When they had this problem, they got help from their students. Students learnt easily without hesitation from their friends than the teachers. Student's better performance helped teacher to extend knowledge and skills in classroom to other students.

In today's observation class, I witnessed an incident that OT2 made negative remarks on the presentations of a group. He compared with another group and said, "*Yesto ni huns presentation? Laj lagdaina timiharulai? Kasari padikhauxau yestale? Hera ta uniharuko kasto ramro chha*" (Is this like presentation? Don't you feel same? How will you study and get success? See how nice they presented). I saw the faces of students and noticed how they felt. It was quit harassing to them.

As I saw the faces of those students, I could easily guess how they felt embraced in front of others. After the class I asked one of the students, "How did you feel when your teacher harassed you?" He replied, "*Aba yo sirko period ma ta kehi pani boldina volidekhi* (I won't speak a word in his class from tomorrow)". It shows that students do not like to respond when teachers show agger and compare to other friends.

Reflection of Class Observation: Day 9

Teacher took whole time 45 minutes for activities and engagements. The task was given in groups made students engaged. In the beginning, many students were inactive to discuss in their groups. When the teacher encouraged them to do, they

were ready. Members in the groups discussed. Some students wanted more time to prepare. Despite the teacher's unwillingness, he added the time. It was because of the students' persistent request. Engagement in the class within group activities brought different ideas in an issue. Not only the leader, but all members from the group also presented. This gave everyone similar chance to present in the class. No single student dominated the activities and presentation. Everyone got chance to involve in discussion and presentation. Teacher's interest of involving all student in activities was possible and successful.