CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1   General Background

Language is at the centre of human life. Through language, we exchange ideas and experience and we form our social and individual identities. Among many languages in the world, English is the most widely used international language. It has been used in diverse contexts around the globe as a principal language for global communication and gateway to the world body of knowledge. As a result the non-native speakers of English are more than its native speakers today. This view is clearly expressed by Rajagopalan (2004, p.111) "English belongs to everyone who speak it, but it is nobody's mother tongue"(as cited in Harmer, 2008, p.18). English is now used more often as a lingua franca than as native language. Today, English is widely studied foreign language in the world. Harmer (2008) states:

> English is also, of course, a mother tongue for many people in the world, though, as we shall see, such native speakers are increasingly out-numbered by people who have English as a second or third language and use it for international communication (p.13).

English is the widely used language in every field like literature, mass media, information technology, business, administration and so on. In this way, the increasing requirements of the people to use English for various purposes have accelerated the teaching and learning of English. Realizing the significance of English, large mass has been attracted towards it. This century has not found the totally successful methods of teaching and still searching for the perfect way of teaching simultaneously to different people with individual differences. Teaching English in mixed ability classes is one of the major challenges faced by EFL teachers. In such type of classes, a teacher may not be familiar with

different needs and prospects of students. No two humans are the same in the world as human beings have multiple intelligences. Students are different in many ways. Some are quick others are slow; some are confident; others are shy; some like working with friends; others are happier working alone. Likewise, students have different preferences for learning and displaying their work. All pupils will show strengths at different times depending on the topic being studied and the learning style being used. Regarding the mixed ability students, Valentic (2005) clearly states:

> Children come to school with different experience and expectations. Their expectations about learning and classroom behavior are different. That is why, even from the beginning, there will be the difference in their approach, self-discipline, attitude and ability in the classroom. The more students we have in the class, the grater difference among them may appear. Taking these differences in consideration we cannot expect all the students to be able to do the same tasks in the same way at the same time and with the same interest (p.1).

In some classes, some students can read and comprehend almost as good as upper level students and there are few students who might appear to facing difficulty in understanding the basic information. These differences may raise students' anxiety level and lower their self-esteem. The teacher should know the students individually to give them feedback. The feedback should be motivating so that the weaker students revise the errors they have made. There is the danger that the more able might not be stretched enough while the less able are neglected. One of the unavoidable challenges of having many students in the same class is that there will be wide range of language proficiency levels in the class and it is difficult to adjust lesson plans to fit learning needs of all the individual students.

Though responding to every student needs and expectations in mixed ability classroom is certainly a difficult task; it is not completely impossible one. There are several things that a teacher can do for this. Teaching in mixed-ability class will work if all pupils are allowed to experience success and to learn as individuals. It is less likely to be successful if teachers insist on whole class teaching and teaching to the average child. A teacher should act as a model for learning and teach pupils how to become independent and effective learners. Pupils need to be taught learning techniques and how to be resourceful learners. The emphasis should not be on what teachers teach but on what pupils learn.

As students of the same age vary in their intellectual, physical and emotional development and majority of classroom are made up of mixed-ability group, the teacher should embrace diversity among the students in the classroom. Teachers should be aware of the possible problems and ways of overcoming them. They should also recognize the students' strengths and weaknesses, plan lesson accordingly and use appropriate teaching strategies to fit each child's abilities and background.

1.1.1 English Language Teaching in Nepal

English language has become a part of human life which is being taught and learnt as a foreign language in many countries like Nepal. English language teaching (ELT) in Nepal started long ago and now it has occupied an important place in Nepalese Education.

Nepali statesmen like Prithvi Narayan Shah and Bhimsen Thapa tried their best not to let English flourish in Nepal. However, after the unification of Nepal, English slowly became widespread with different twists and directions, when Jung Bahadur Rana returned from Europe, he thought of new programmes, and one of them was educating his sons and grandsons in English. After his arrival from Britain, he arranged for two of the English teachers from Britain, to teach his brothers and nephews English on ground floor of Thapathali Durbar.

Regarding the position of English in Nepalese educational system, Awasthi (2003) opines:

> English entered in the Nepalese education in 1954 when the Prime
>
> Minister Jung Bahadur Rana opened a high school in Kathmandu. The
>
> introduction of English language teaching (ELT) in Nepalese education
>
> started only in 1971With the implementation of National education
>
> system plan (NESP) and still continues (p.22).

English, which was once the language of rulers and elites, has now reached the mass from the urban locations to schools in the hills. The English teaching and learning of the language has now occupied an important place in the Nepalese education system. The university Department of English and the Board of English studies made some remarkable efforts from 1962 onwards in improving the teaching of English in the university. Professional organizations like Nepal English Language Teachers' Association (NELTA) have been organizing annual conference every year when hundreds of Nepali English teachers and their counterpart from different parts of the world meet and share their experiences and pedagogies. Nepali writers have begun to write course books and Nepali literature, stories, essays and poems have been translated into English for wider readership. Bhattarai and Gautam (2005) mention:

> The crave for English language has grown so much that by no within a
>
> span of three decades there are large number of publishing houses that
>
> produce materials in English, these are prepared mostly by native
>
> (Nepali) writers and editors, these are different training institutes and
>
> their training centre, different teams of writers, translators, trainers, all
>
> for promoting English all engaged in ELT enterprise (p.1).

Nepal adopted different policies for English education at various stages of time. Now English has been introduced from grade one in government schools. In government schools, the children have to study one English subject and other subjects are in Nepali. Therefore, most of the children studying in governmental schools are not being able to write and read nicely.

1.1.2 Mixed-ability Classroom

The term 'mixed-ability' refers to the quality of being different ability and having individual differences. Mixed-ability classroom is one that has different kinds of learners in it having their own potential, strengths and weaknesses. They have different preferences for learning and displaying their work. Mixed ability classroom does not just consist of a range of abilities but also a range of learning styles and preferences. They have different interests, hobbies, religions and beliefs. There are many learners' differences in this type of classes such as differences in language learning ability, their cultural background, learning styles, age, attitude toward language mother tongue, learning experience, motivational orientation, etc.

In a language classroom, all the students may not be similar in their ability, educational and cultural background, maturity as well as personalities. Such type of classes that have students of different levels of language proficiency, varied interest and language learning experiences is defined as a mixed ability language classroom. In a language classroom, the students may be at different levels; having varied learning speed and learning ability. Teachers regularly face mixed-ability groups where different individuals are at different levels and have different abilities. Teachers face with individuals who have different language knowledge, different intelligences, different learning speeds, and different learning styles and preferences. Because of such a variation among learners in the classroom, the teachers' challenges and responsibilities have been multiplied. As Harmer (2008) states:

It is inconceivable that any two students will have exactly the same knowledge of English at any one time. Even if we were able to assemble a class of complete beginners, it would soon be clear that some were learning faster than other or learning different things. Furthermore, these differences raise students' anxiety level and lower their self-esteem. At the same time, there are more comments, more personal experiences, more opinions and ideas shared among students, these classes provide more chances to enhance mutual learning by forming cross-ability groups (p.127).

The teacher should know the students individually to give feedback and should be aware of problems resulting from mixed-ability classroom to minimize the probable challenges. Learners should be helped to become independent and creative. Teachers should act as role models for learning and teach pupil how to become independent and effective learners.

1.1.3 Learner Differences

A class is composed of individuals rather than being some kind of unified whole. In a classroom, there will be students of different age, cognitive style, interest, language, proficiency and so on. There may be marked differences, not only in terms of their age and level but in terms of different individual abilities, knowledge and preferences. In a classroom there may be students who differ from each other in motivation, goals for learning, aptitude, zone of proximal development, ethnic or national origin, gender, socio-economic status and linguistic and cultural heritage.

Ur (1996, p. 304) mentions the following differences between learners:
− Language learning ability
− Language knowledge

- Cultural background

- Learning style

- Attitude to the language

- Mother tongue

- Intelligence

- World knowledge

- Learning experience

- Knowledge of other language

- Age or maturity

- Gender

- Personality

- Confidence

- Motivation

- Interests

- Independence

- Self-discipline

- Educational level

Similarly, Harmer (2008, p.21) mentions some of the learners' differences as follows:

a.   Age

Learners are often described as children, young learners, adolescents, young adults or adults. The age of the students is a major factor that causes mixed-ability.

b.   Learning Styles

All the students respond to various stimuli (such as pictures, sounds, music, movements, etc.), but for most of them something stimulates them into learning more than other things do. Some students are especially influenced by visual stimuli and are therefore likely remember things better if they see them. Some

students, on the other hand, are especially affected by auditory input and, as a result, respond very well to things they hear. In any one classroom we have a number of different individuals with different learning styles and preferences.

c.   Language Levels

Students are generally described in terms of three levels, beginner, intermediate and advanced and these categories are further qualified by talking about real beginners and false beginners. Between beginner and intermediate we often group students as elementary.

d.   Educational and Cultural Background

Another aspect of individual variation lies into students' cultural and educational background. Some children come from homes where education is highly valued, and where parental help is readily available. Other children, however, may come from less supportive background where no such backup is on offer. If students have different cultural background from the teacher or from each other, they may feel differently from their classmates, about topics in curriculum. They may have different responses to classroom practices from the ones the teacher expected.

e.   Motivation

A variety of factors can create a desire to learn. Perhaps the learners love the subject they have chosen, or maybe they are simply interested in seeing what it is like. The strength of the motivation will depend upon how much value the individual places on the outcome he or she wishes to achieve.

f.   Responsibility for Learning

Mixed-ability class involves many types of learners. Teaching in mixed-ability class will be effective if all students are allowed to experience success and to learn as individuals. It is less likely to be successful if teachers insist on whole class teaching and teaching to the average child. Getting students to do various

kinds of homework, such as written exercise, compositions or further study is one of the best ways to encourage student's autonomy. Students should be made responsible learners so that they can use the self-access centre with a range of resources comprising books, newspapers, magazines, worksheets, listening materials. In this way, variation among learners can be observed in terms of their responsibility for learning.

After considering the above mentioned views, it is summed up that the children vary in intellectual, emotional, and social maturity, in language fluency and physical appearance, as well as family background, motivation and so on. This makes the classroom mixed-ability group.

1.1.4. Mixed-ability Classes: Challenges for EFL Teachers

One of the unavoidable challenges of having mixed-ability class is that there will be wide range of language proficiency levels in the class and it is difficult for teachers to adjust their lesson plans to fit the learning needs of all the individual students. Because of different levels of proficiency in mixed ability groups, it is very difficult to keep the attention of all the students at the same time in such a condition teachers face challenges. Harmer (2008) expresses the similar view:

> Many teachers are extremely worried about the fact that they have
>
> students in their classroom who are at different levels of proficiency.
>
> Indeed mixed ability classes are major preoccupation for most of us
>
> because they appear to make planning and the execution of plans in
>
> lesson-extremely difficult (p.127).

All classes have students with a mixture of different abilities and language levels some of the challenges that teachers in mixed-ability classroom face are discipline, correcting written assignments, effective learning for all,

participation, less interest of students in learning, individual awareness, activating the quiet students, using appropriate materials and so on.

Ur (2005, p.134) expresses teaching problems in large heterogeneous classes as follows:

− Discipline
− Correcting written assignments
− Interest
− Effective learning
− Materials
− Individual awareness
− Participation

It is difficult for EFL teachers to find topics and activities that keep them all interested and difficult to make sure that they are learning effectively. The tasks provided may be either too difficult or too easy for many of them. As most of the textbooks are homogenous and are aimed for average kind of learners, with no options or flexibility, the teacher may face problems to find suitable materials. The teacher may find problems in adapting teaching methods and techniques as every method may not work for all sort of students simultaneously. Depending on the country, area and the school itself, teachers may have different challenges in teaching mixed ability classes. There is danger that the more able students might not be stretched enough while the less able are neglected. For creating an interface in such classroom, the teacher has to mix and match various theories of ELT.

Teachers may be challenged to constantly acquire new information technology (IT) skills that keep their practice at the forefront of technological developments, while expectations about their proficiency with technology continues to increase. The students in mixed-ability classroom may not be co-operative, some may not do assignments, some may not want to talk and some of the students may finish the task before everybody else while others have not

started doing. As mixed-ability classrooms include the students who differ in their abilities; language proficiency, learning strategies, expectations and motivation, it may be the challenging job for a teacher to give attention to the individual students. Teachers working in mixed- ability classroom encounter many problems like, low student interaction and participation, different learning styles and excessive use of mother tongue.

Based on Prodromou (1992), Ur (1996), and Hess (2006) the problems in a mixed ability classroom can also be noted as follows:

a)   Some of the students are advanced and lose their interest in the class, and some of them hardly know any English at all and are forced to quit. There are some students who always participate in the classroom and others who seem totally indifferent week students feel disappointed and don't want to take part in the lesson. Some of them are aggressive and in domineering teacher can create an inferiority complex in weak students.

b)   The teacher finds it difficult to teach the same kind of material to all the students. It is difficult to find out appropriate teaching techniques and materials for each individual.

c)   It is not easy to determine individual needs of every student.

d)   Students of low level may feel threatened, left out and frustrated as a result they may lose their self-esteem while Students of high level may feel bored.

e)   It is challenging for a teacher to select the task for each individual as their proficiency level and ensuring the equal participation of all types of students.

f)   It is challenging for a teacher to keep all the students interested in the classroom.

g)   Teacher may face problem in devising differentiated tasks and providing students with different material.

h)   It is difficult to manage time and give attention equally to all students since there are too many differences to be taken into consideration.

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i)   Another major challenge in mixed ability classroom is deciding the level of input, as in the mixed-ability classroom the students vary significantly in their current level of language proficiency.

j)   Correcting all the written assignments within the limited period of time is also a challenge for a teacher.

k)   Teachers themselves are the main cause of the problem, by expecting students to learn the same things at the same time.

l)   There is often a feeling amongst teachers that they are working with inappropriate content, frequently because an author has targeted an age or socio-economic group that does not reflect their learner's experience and aspirations. Methodology is also often perceived as a problem.

1.1.5 Mixed-ability Classroom: Some Opportunities

Mixed-ability classroom can also have some benefits if teachers know how to make use of the difference as a positive asset. Professional development occurs naturally when there are students of different ability in the same classroom. Each individual can bring different and new ideas. If they share the same experience and ideas with their friends, the poor and slow students can be benefited. Those with limited proficiency have opportunities to interact with more proficient English speakers, and advanced learners benefit by using their English skills to help lower level students negotiate meaning. Students in such classes can learn to work together across differences and develop learning communities in which members learn from one another's strength.

In this regard, Ur (1996, p. 305) argues that peer teaching and collaboration are likely to be fairly common, in such classes, fostering an atmosphere of cooperation. Similarly, Hess (2006, p. 3) says that cross-ability grouping allows the more able learners to improve their language skills by honing their ability to explain, to state clearly, and to give effective examples, while it proves the less able with considerable support.

Since mixed-ability classes are challenging to teach, they provide greater opportunity for creativity and innovation. such classes compel the teachers to find better ways of setting up routine tasks. These are the classes that make us think, create and grow as teachers. Therefore, one of the most important benefits of having mixed-ability classes in professional development of the teachers. As such classes need to be creative and innovative, teachers search for better and innovative teaching methods and strategies, by this teacher can develop their professionalism.

In mixed-ability classroom, the students need to take responsibility for their own learning, which enhances learners' autonomy. Learner autonomy in their own learning is another advantage of having mixed-ability classroom.

Hess (2006, pp.2-4) has presented some of the advantages in a mixed-ability classroom as follows:

–   We get rich variety of human resources
–   The teacher is not only pedagogue, we are never bored
–   There are always enough students for interaction.
–   Professional development occurs naturally.

Some of the opportunities in mixed-ability classes can be briefly noted down based on Ur (1996) and Prodromou (1992):

1.   Students can use their skill to help each other and it enhances co-operative learning.
2.   Students develop strong relationship with their peers and they become partner in learning. Thus, it enhances the peer support strategy in the classroom.
3.   Teachers can learn to provide more teaching activities and methods. By this, they can develop their teaching skills.
4.   Dissimilarity in students can be used in creating interesting, varied, meaningful and student centered lessons.

1.1.6 Possible Ways of Dealing with the Challenges

Teachers working in mixed ability classroom encounter many problems like low student interaction and participation, different learning styles and different levels of proficiency in language. Teachers should recognize the strengths and weaknesses of each individual, control them and deliver the lesson plan effectively.

There have been different approaches, methods techniques in the field of language teaching. In spite of various methodologies recommended by different scholars, there is not a completely successful method of teaching simultaneously to different pupil with individual differences. One should develop his/her own way to deal with the situation. It is less likely to be successful if teachers insist on whole class teaching and teaching to the average child. The effectiveness of teaching English in mixed-ability classes depends on the teacher and how s/he selects appropriate methods and involves all the students in various activities according to their interest and level. In this regard, Harmer (2008, p.128) says, "One way of working with students at different levels and with different needs is to provide them with different materials, tailoring what we give them to their individual needs."

Based on Harmer (2008), Ur (1996) and Prodromou (1992) language teacher can adopt following principles for coping with possible challenges:

a)   Vary material and texts

Giving students different materials, tasks and roles can be effective in mixed ability classroom. Ur (2005, p.135) suggests teachers to vary materials and texts to address different types of learners.

b)   Identification of students strengths (Linguistic or non-linguistic)

One of the ways we can make a virtue of different student abilities is to include tasks which do not necessarily demand linguistic brilliance but instead allow students to show off offer other talents they have. For example, a student with developed scientific intelligence may be asked to explain a scientific concept before students are asked read a science based text.

c)   Cooperative learning

Collaborative learning has become increasingly popular as a feature of CLT with benefits that include increased student interest due to the quick of the cooperative tasks, improved critical thinking ability, and the opportunity to practice both the productive and receptive skills in a natural context. It is, therefore, important to encourage cooperative learning in a mixed-ability classroom.

d)   Encouraging different student responses

The students should be allowed to express their own experience, opinions or imagination. Harmer (2008, p.129) says, "We can give students exactly the same materials and tasks but expect (and accept) different student responses to them."

e)   Making the activities interesting

Once the class loses interest, it will result into lack of attention, demotivation, use of mother tongue etc. So, materials and topics should be selected that helps to make the class interesting. Ur (1996, p.306) suggests teachers to make activities interesting so that even if the language is not challenging for some of the learners, the content will hold interest and keep everyone participating.

f)   Adjustment of Pace

Pace is important in mixed-ability classes because without correct pacing, we cannot handle the class activities properly. Activities should not be too fast or

too slow. In this regard, Hess (2006, p.9) says, "Doing an activity to fast or too slowly can ruin the process." So, the pacing should be maintained to the demand of the activity and level of the students.

g)   Using open-ended exercises

Open-ended exercises offer students many opportunities to express their own response with different acceptable answers. Ur (1996, p.309) says, "Open ending means the provision of clues or learning tasks which do not have single predetermined right answers, but a potentially unlimited number of acceptable responses."

h)   Adapting materials

Normally, textbooks are designed for the students of particular level without considering the fact that there might be students with diverse language proficiency. Some tasks and activities might be too easy for some students which for others might be too difficult. So, adapting materials according to the level of students and situation is the best strategy to cope with mixed-ability classroom problems.

1.2   Review of Related Literature

A good number of linguists have dealt with the issues related to English language classroom, its challenges and management. I have reviewed the related literature and prepared notes which are significant to my study. I have attempted to review the researches related to mixed-ability ELT classes. They are as follows:

Prodromou (1992) in his book entitled "Mixed Ability Classes" talks about some problems in mixed-ability classes and some of the solutions to overcome these problems. He has talked about teachers' challenges and responsibilities to manage the classes where students are of different abilities.

Valentic (2005) wrote an article entitled "ELT in Multilevel Classes". In his article, he has discussed about large classes including challenges, opportunities and teaching strategies. He has concluded that teaching in large classes is better than small classes though there are challenges.

In the same way, Hess (2006) in her book entitled "Teaching Large Multilevel Classes" discusses many activities that can be used in mixed ability classes.The activities are concerned with knowing students, motivating them, dealing with written work, making students responsible for own learning, individualizing and personalizing student work, and so on.

Similarly, Jahn (2008) conducted a research on "Promoting Collaboration in Mixed-Ability ELT Classrooms at Tertiary Level in Bangladesh." The purpose of the study was to find out the problems which the Bangladesh English language teachers are facing in dealing with mixed ability groups at tertiary level and how these problems can be overcome by establishing collaborative environment in the class. From the study, Jahn found out that students still think that competitive environment prevails in the classroom and is affecting their learning process.

Ghimire (2011) carried out a research on "Managing Multilevel Diversity in ELT Classes". The main objectives of the study were to identify English teachers' awareness of diversity ELT classes, to explore the challenges of diverse ELT classes, the strategies for coping with those challenges and the students view on such classes. He conducted survey research and collected the data through questionnaire. He concluded that the teachers were aware of the fact on diversity ELT classes but they did not devise different levels of activities for addressing the diverse expectations of students.

Likewise, Bhandari (2012) carried out a research on "Exploring Common Expectations of Students in Large Mixed ability ELT Classes." The main objective of the study was to explore the common expectation of students in large mixed-ability ELT classes and to suggest some pedagogical implications. The sources of data in his study were the secondary level students studying in

Kathmandu valley. He concluded that majority of the students are in favour of the small class size, they expect to be taught using modern materials and most of the students are not satisfied with their text books.

A few studies have been carried out in the field of mixed-ability ELT classes and challenges faced by ELT teachers in Nepal, and there is no any research work carried out on the topic "Perceptions and Challenges of English Language Teachers in Mixed-Ability Classroom". The present work is a new attempt in the exploration of challenges faced by ELT teachers in mixed-ability ELT classes.

1.3   Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study will be as follows:

 i.   To identify English language teachers' perceptions toward mixed-ability classrooms.
 ii.   To explore the challenges faced by EFL teachers in mixed-ability classroom.
 iii.   To suggest some pedagogical implications based on the findings of the study.

1.4   Significance of the Study

Nepal is multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual country. In the context of Nepal, Teaching is more difficult and challenging since there is a large number of students in a less facilitated classroom with mixed abilities. Achieving targeted goal in classroom is hindered and obstacled by such mixed-ability classroom. Having students with different level of language proficiency is one of the biggest problems teachers face. Since this study focuses on exploring the challenges of mixed-ability classes along with the strategies to cope with the challenges, it will be of considerable importance to English language teachers working in mixed-ability classroom. In addition, all the people who are directly or indirectly involved in language teaching will be benefited from this study.

CHAPTER TWO
METHODOLOGY

To fulfill the objectives of the study, the following methodology was adopted:

2.1   Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary sources of data were used to meet the objectives of the study. The primary sources were used for collecting data, and the secondary sources were used to facilitate the research.

2.1.1   Primary Sources of Data

The primary sources of this study were the 40 secondary level English language teachers from the selected schools of Kanchanpur district. The data from primary sources were collected by administering a questionnaire.

2.1.2   Secondary Sources of Data

The secondary sources of data were the various books, theses, articles, journals and internet. Some of them included: Ellis (1985), Produomou (1992), Ur (1996), Hess (2006), Harmer (2008), Gass and Selinker (2008), Journal of NELTA (Vol. III), Young Voice in ELT (Vol. V).

2.2   Sampling Procedure

The study population of this study was the secondary level English teachers of Private and Community aided schools. The total sample size consisted of 40 secondary level English teachers working in Kanchanpur district. The sample was taken from 20 selected schools. Half of the sample was selected from community schools and the rest of them were from private schools. The selection was done through purposive non-random sampling procedure.

2.3   Tools for Data Collection

The main tool for collecting the data was a set of questionnaire. Both close-ended and open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire. The items in questionnaires were related to English language teachers' perceptions toward mixed-ability classroom, challenges and ways of coping with the challenges.

2.4   Process of Data Collection

I collected the data from the primary sources by administering the questionnaire. For this purpose, I adopted the following steps:

i.   At first, I went to the selected schools, built rapport with the authority and explained them the purpose of the study.

ii.   After this, I consulted the English language teachers, explained the purpose of the research and requested them to respond the questionnaire.

iii.   After this, I distributed the questionnaire.

iv.   Finally, I collected the questionnaire thanking for their co-operation.

2.5   Limitations of the Study

The study had the following limitations:

i.   The study was limited to secondary level English teachers working in government aided and private schools of Kanchanpur district.

ii.   Similarly, the study was limited to the 40 secondary level English teachers.

iii.   Like wise, questionnaires were the only tool for data collection.

iv.   It was limited to explore the perceptions of secondary level English teachers toward mixed-ability classes and their challenges.

CHAPTER THREE
ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Forty secondary level English teachers working in the Kanchanpur district were the primary sources of data and a set of questionnaire was the tool for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two main areas.

a.   Perceptions towards mixed-ability classroom.

b.   Challenges faced by EFL teachers in mixed-ability classroom.

Most of the questions were close-ended in nature and very few questions were open-ended in nature. The data collected through the questionnaire are analyzed and interpreted under the above mentioned two areas.

3.1   Perceptions Towards Mixed-Ability Classrooms

This part consists of a set of questions releted to teachers' perceptions toward mixed-ability classrooms. The data obtained from the teachers are analyzed and interpreted as below:

3.1.1   Analysis and Interpretation of Teachers' Responses

Ten questions were related to the perceptions toward mixed-ability classes. The item wise analysis and interpretation of the data obtained is presented below.

3.1.1.1 View of Teachers' Toward Mixed-ability Classes

Under this topic two statements were given to the respondents, both of which were intended to find out whether the teachers are familiar with the term mixed-ability classes or not.

First statement was "ELT class, I deal with is mixed-ability group". The responses obtained from the respondents are presented in the figure below:

Figure No. 1

Views of Teachers Toward Mixed-ability Classes
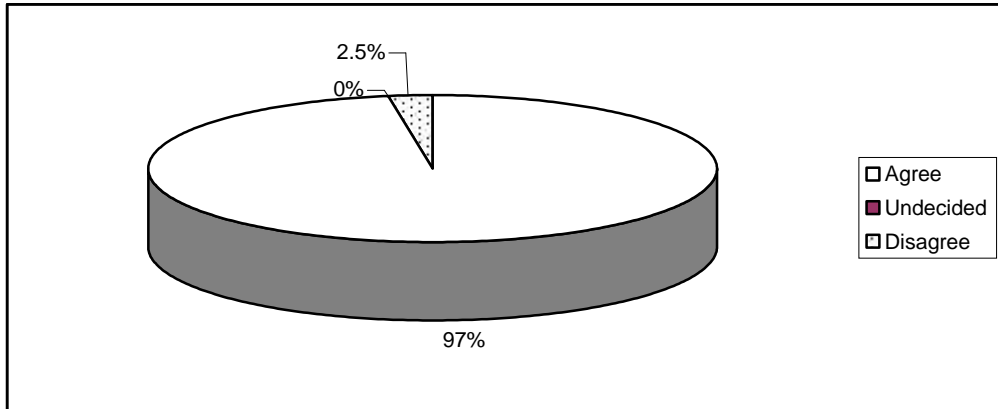
The figure above shows that 97.5 per cent of the total respondents agreed with the statement, 2.5 per cent remained undecided and none of them disagreed. These responses indicate that the teachers took their classes as mixed-ability group.

Another statement was "Mixed-ability classroom has different kinds of learners having their own potentiality, strengths and weaknesses". The responses obtained from the respondents are presented in the figure below:

Figure No. 2

Views of Teachers Toward Mixed-ability Classes
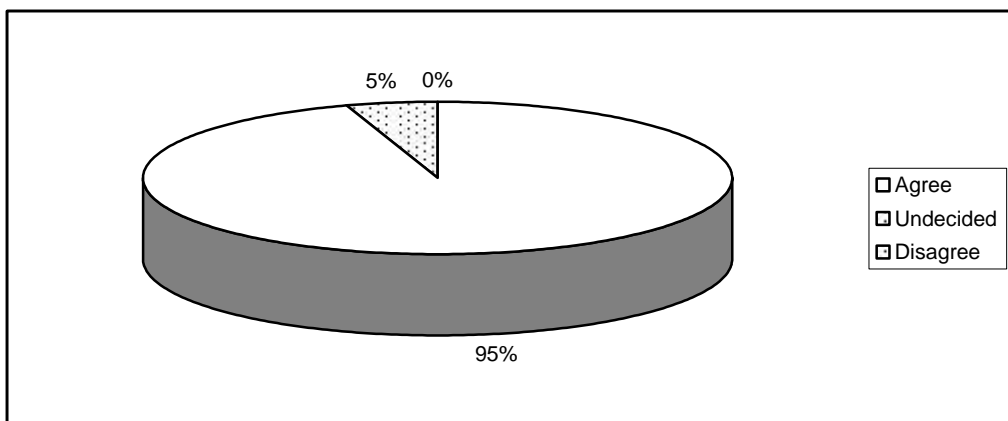
The figure above shows that 95 per cent of the total respondents agreed with the statement, 5 per cent remained undecided and none of them disagreed. These responses indicate that the teachers were familiar with the concept of mixed-ability classes.

3.1.1.2 Nature of Mixed-ability Classroom

The third statement was "All classes are of mixed-ability". This statement was intended to obtain responses towards the common nature of ELT classes of being mixed-ability group. The responses are presented in figure below:

Figure No. 3
Nature of Mixed-ability Classroom
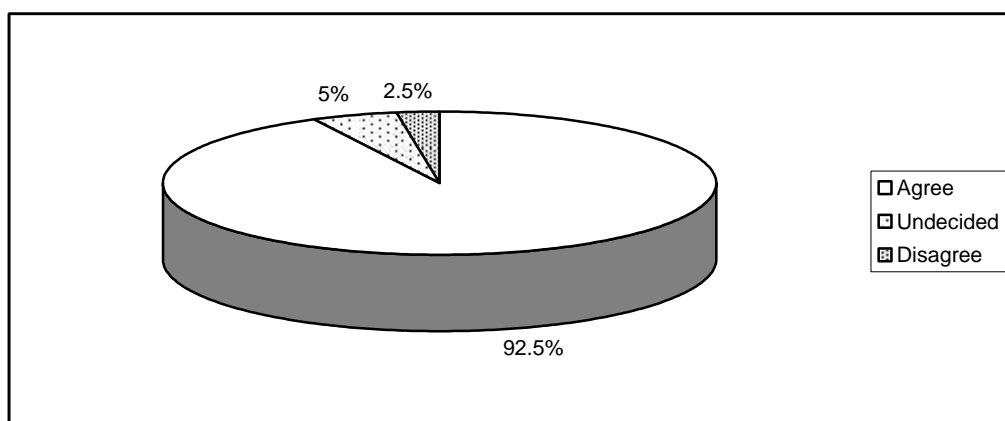
Out of total fourty respondents, only 2.5 per cent of the total respondents disagreed, 5 per cent was undecided and 92.5 per cent of them agreed with the statement. It indicated that all the ELT classes were of mixed-ability.

Next statement in this topic was intended to obtain respondents' responses on whether mixed-ability in ELT classes is avoidable or unavoidable. The responses obtained from the respondents to this statement are presented in the figure below:

Figure No. 4
Nature of Mixed-ability Classroom
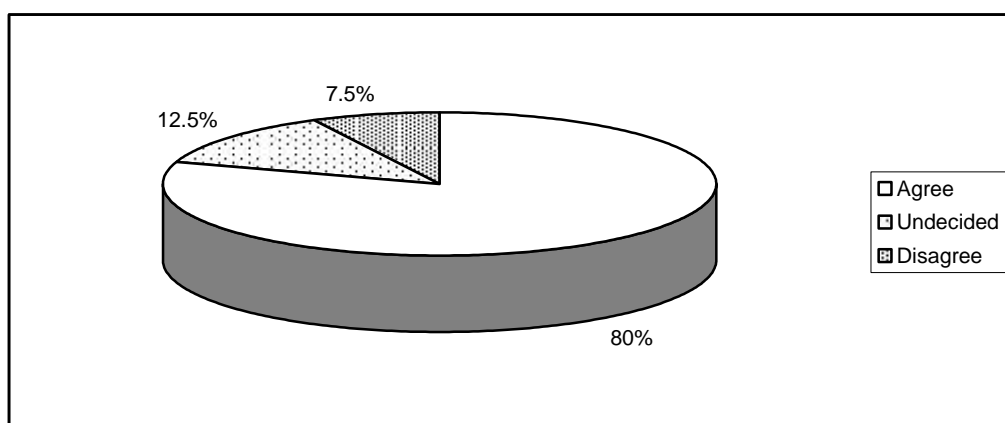
The data obtained showed that 80 per cent of the total respondents agreed, 12.5 per cent was undecided and 7.5 per cent of them disagreed with the statement. It shows that mixed-ability in ELT classes was unavoidable.

3.1.1.3 Diversity in Mixed-ability Classroom

The statement in this topic was intended to obtain respondents' response towards individual differences in mixed-ability classrooms. The responses obtained from the respondents to this statement are present in the figure below:

Figure No. 5

Diversity in Mixed-ability Classroom
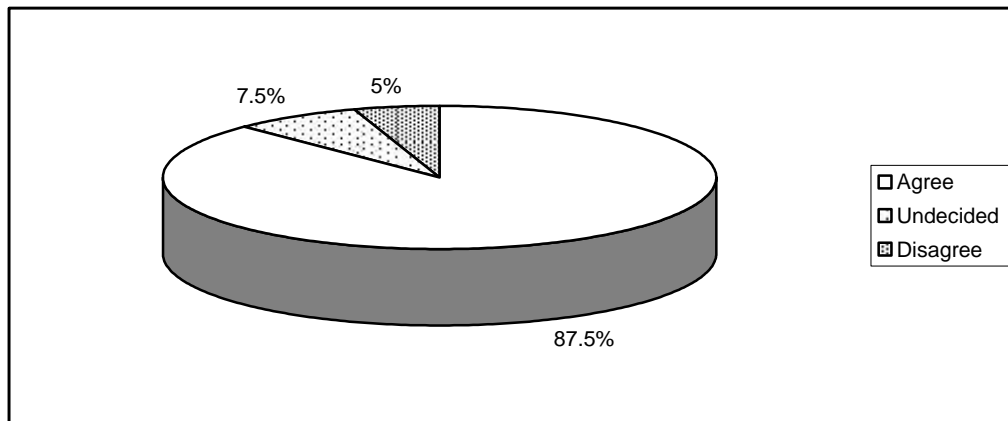
From the figure above it is clear that 87.5 per cent of the total respondents agreed with the statement, 7.5 per cent were undecided and 5 per cent disagreed. From this we can conclude that individual differences lead mixed-ability classroom.

Next statement used in this topic was "The more students we have in the class, the greater differences among them appear". The following figure clearly shows the responses obtained to this statement.

Figure No. 6

Diversity in Mixed-ability Classroom
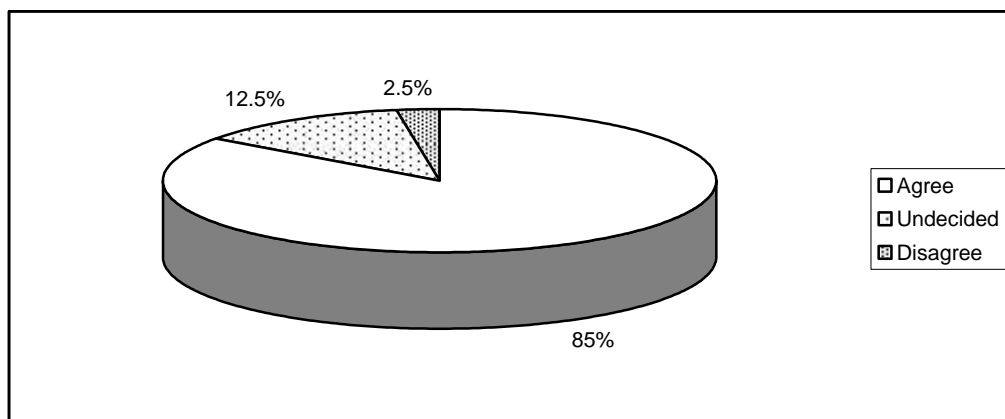
As indicated in the figure above, out of the total respondents, 85 per cent agreed 12.5 per cent were undecided and 2.5 per cent disagreed with the statement. The data indicates that greater differences among the students appear when there are more students in the class.

3.1.1.4 Complexity of Mixed-Ability Classrooms

The respondents were requested to provide their responses on whether mixed-ability classrooms are complex and time consuming or not. The responses obtained to this statement are presented in the figure below:

Figure No. 7

Complexity of Mixed-ability Classroom
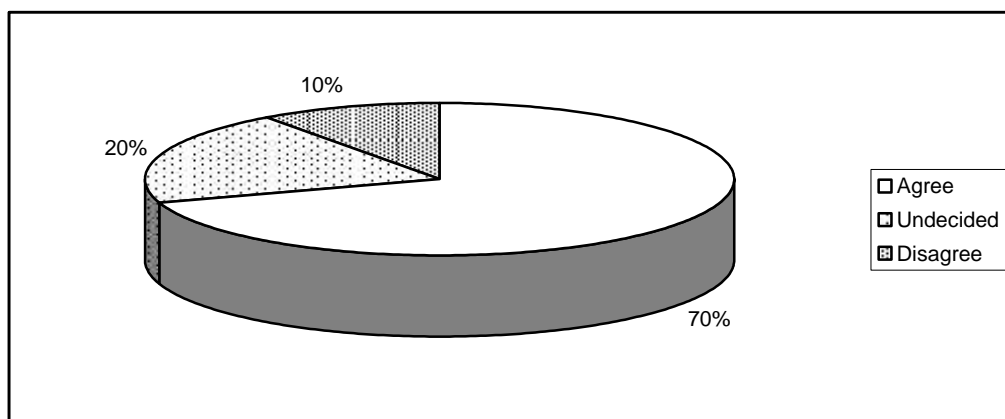
The figure shows that 70 per cent of the total respondents agreed, 20 per cent of them were undecided and 10 per cent of them disagreed with the statement.

From this, it can be concluded that mixed-ability classrooms are complex and time consuming.

3.1.1.5 Mixed-ability Classes and Language Proficiency

The statement under this topic was intended to find out the respondents' opinion regarding the language proficiency levels of students in mixed-ability classrooms. The statement was "Almost all ELT classes have students who are at different levels of language proficiency". The schematic presentation of the data obtained is as below:

Figure No. 8

Mixed-ability classes and Language Proficiency
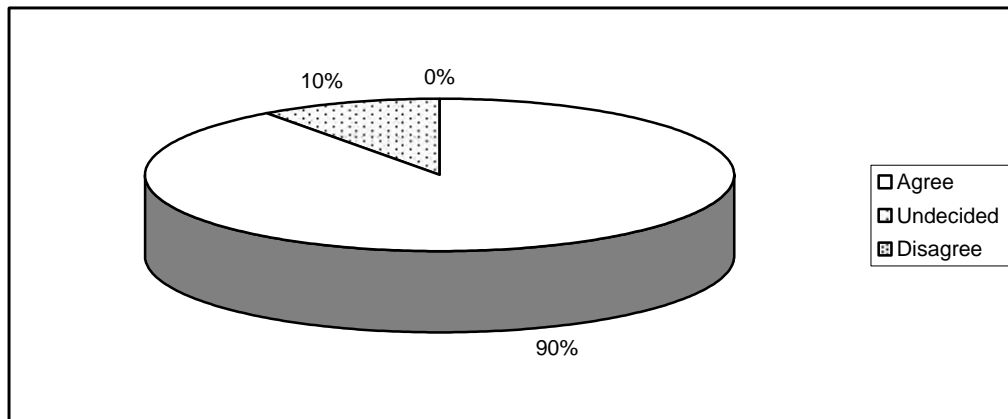
As indicated in the figure above, out of the total respondents, 90 per cent agreed with the statement, 10 per cent were undecided and none of them disagreed. The data indicates that almost all ELT classes have students who are at different levels of language proficiency.

3.1.1.6 Benefit of Being Mixed-ability Group

In order to find out the teachers' responses to whether mixed-ability creates lively context for language teaching, a statement was given. The statement was 'Mixed-ability in ELT class creates lively context for language teaching. The responses obtained to this statement are presented in the figure below:

Figure No. 9

Benefit of Being Mixed-ability Group
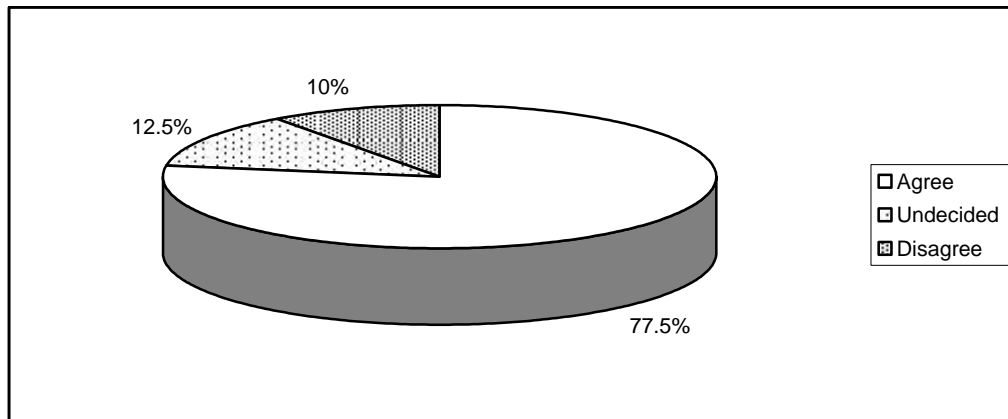
As indicated in the figure above, 77.5 per cent of the total respondents agreed with the statement, 12.5 per cent marked undecided and 10 per cent disagreed with the statement. These data show that most of the teachers thought that mixed-ability created lively context for language teaching.

3.1.1.7 Valuing and Appreciating Mixed-ability Group

Next statement was put up to the respondents to findout their opinion regaring acceptance of mixed-ability group in ELT classroom as common phenomenon. The schematic presentation of the data obtained is given below:

Figure No. 10

Valuing and Appreciating Mixed-ability Group
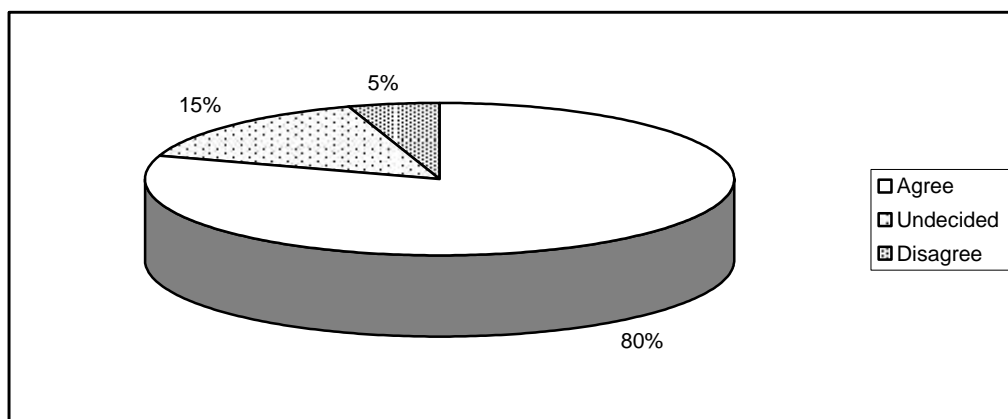
The figure clearly shows that 80 per cent of the total respondents agreed, 15 per cent of them remained undecided and 5 per cent of them disagreed with the

statement. From this, it can be concluded that all the teachers should accept mixed-ability group in ELT classroom.

3.2   Challenges Faced by EFL Teachers in Mixed-ability Classroom

This part consisted of a set of questions related to the challenges faced by EFL teachers in mixed-ability classroom. The data obtained from the teachers are analyzed and interpreted below:

3.2.1   Challenges in Mixed-ability Classrooms

The statement was intended to find out whether the respondents take mixed-ability classes as problematic or not. The responses obtained from the informants are presented in the figure below:

Figure No. 11

Challenges in Mixed-ability Classrooms
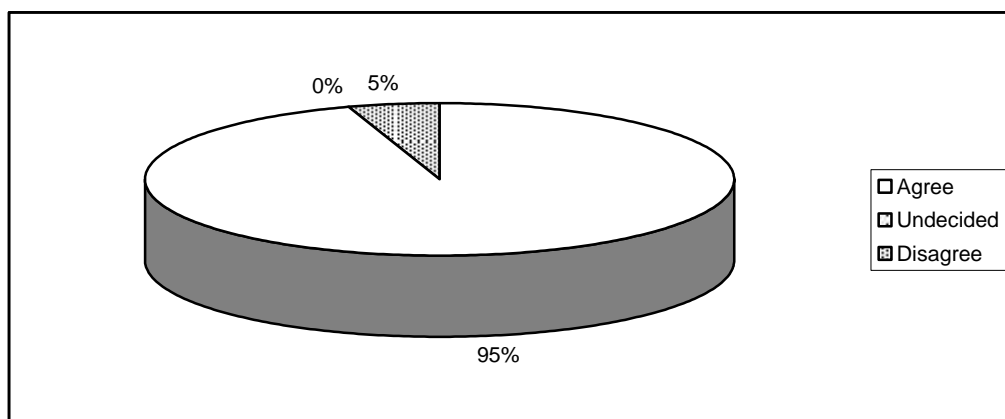
As indicated in the figure, out of the fourty respondents, 95 per cent agreed, none of them were undecided and 5 per cent disagreed with the statement. The data indicated that mixed-ability classes were problematic and almost all the teachers faced challenges to teach in mixed-ability classroom.

3.2.2   Time with the Slow Learners

The statement under this topic was intended to findout their opinion regarding time spend with the slow learners. The statement was 'I have to spend too much

time with the slow learners'. The schematic presentation of the data obtained is given below:

Figure No. 12

Time with the Slow Learners

2.5%

0%
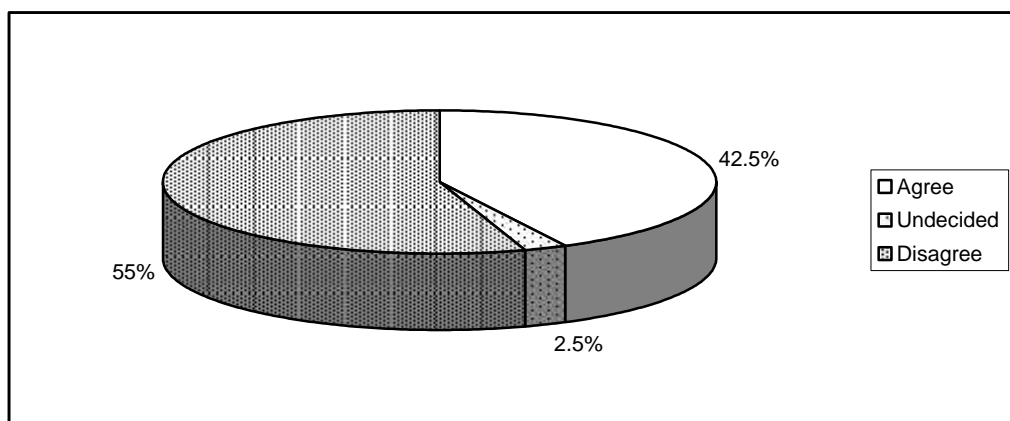
Agree
Undecided
Disagree

97.5%
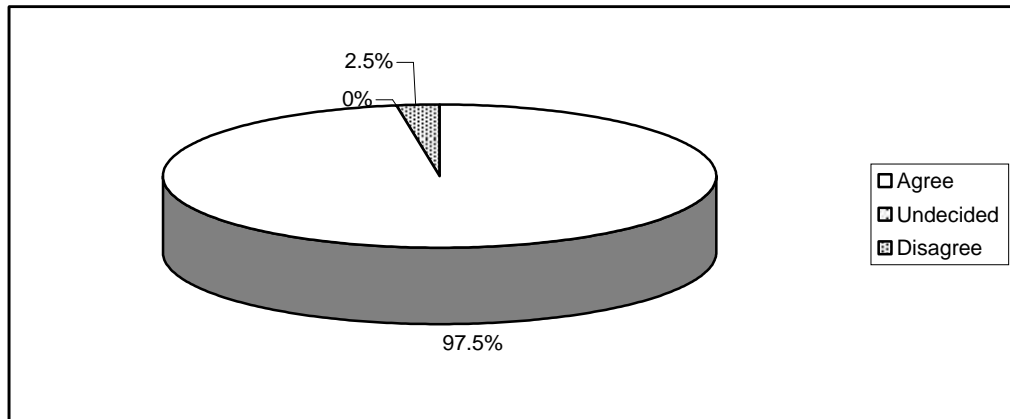
The figure clearly shows that 97.5 per cent of the total respondents agreed, 2.5 per cent disagreed with the statement and none of them was undecided. From this, it can be concluded that teachers faced challenge of spending too much time with the slow learners.

3.2.3 Meeting the Needs of Bright Pupils

To find out the difficulty of teachers to meet the needs of bright pupils, a statement was given. The statement was "It is difficult to meet the needs of bright pupils". The responses obtained are schematically presented below:

Figure No. 13

Meeting the Needs of Bright Pupils

42.5%

Agree
Undecided
Disagree

55%

2.5%

The figure above displays that out of forty respondents 42.5 per cent agreed, 2.5 per cent marked undecided and 55 per cent disagreed with the statement. These responses indicated that for most of the teachers it was not difficult to meet the needs of bright pupils.

Next statement in this topic was intended to find out whether the teachers feel more difficulty to teach bright pupils than other pupils.

The statement used was "Bright pupils are more difficult to teach than other pupils". The schematic presentation of the responses obtained is as follows:

Figure No. 14

Meeting the Needs of Bright Pupils
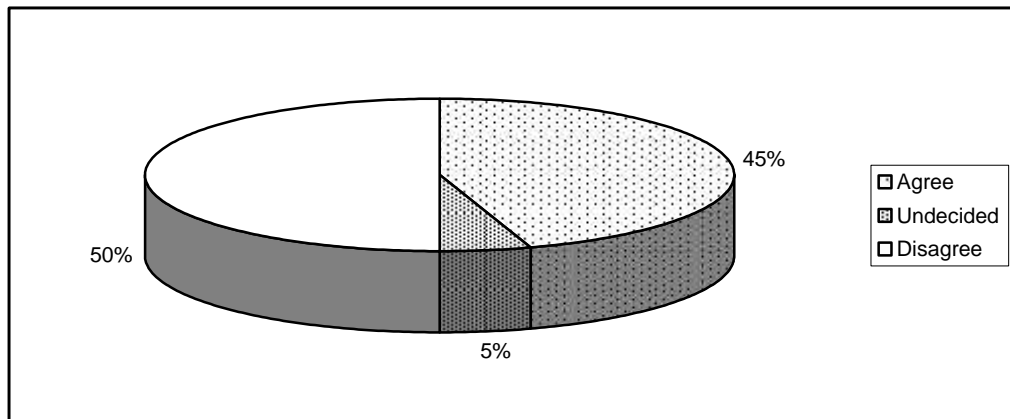
As we can see in the figure above, 50 per cent disagreed, 45 per cent agreed and 5 per cent was undecided. As the majority of the respondents disagreed with the statement, it shows that teachers did not feel any challenge to teach bright pupils.

3.2.4 Selecting Appropriate Level of Instruction and Task

Next statement was put up to find out the difficulty in deciding appropriate instruction and task in a mixed-ability class. The statement was 'Deciding appropriate level of instruction and task is challenging in a mixed-ability class. The responses obtained are schematically presented below:

Figure No. 15

**Selecting Appropriate Level of Instruction and Task**
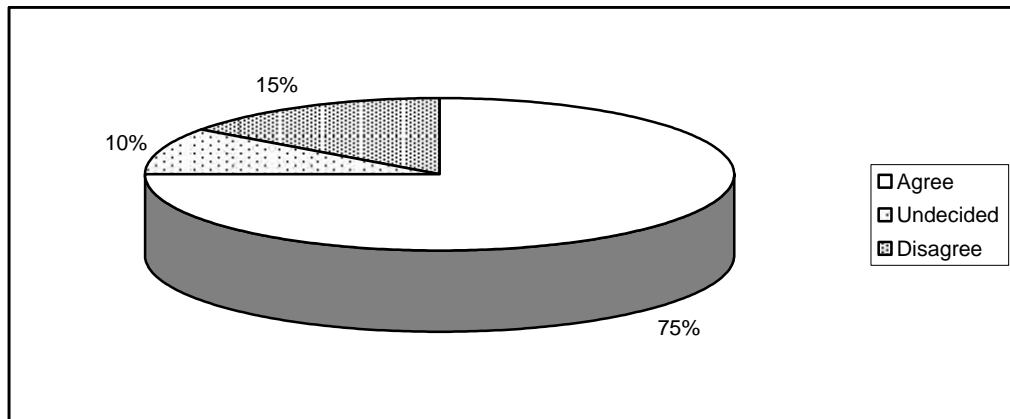
The figure clearly shows that 75 per cent of the total respondents agreed, 10 per cent of them marked undecided and 15 per cent of them disagreed with the statement. While reviewing the responses, it can be concluded that for most of the teachers it was very difficult to decide what kinds of instruction and task was appropriate for different students. They felt difficulty to teach the same kind of material to all the students.

3.2.5 Interest

The statement 'It is difficult to keep the attention of all the students at same time' was intended to find out whether the teachers feel difficulty to keep the attention of all the students at same time. The following figure shows the responses obtained from the respondents.

Figure No. 16

Interest
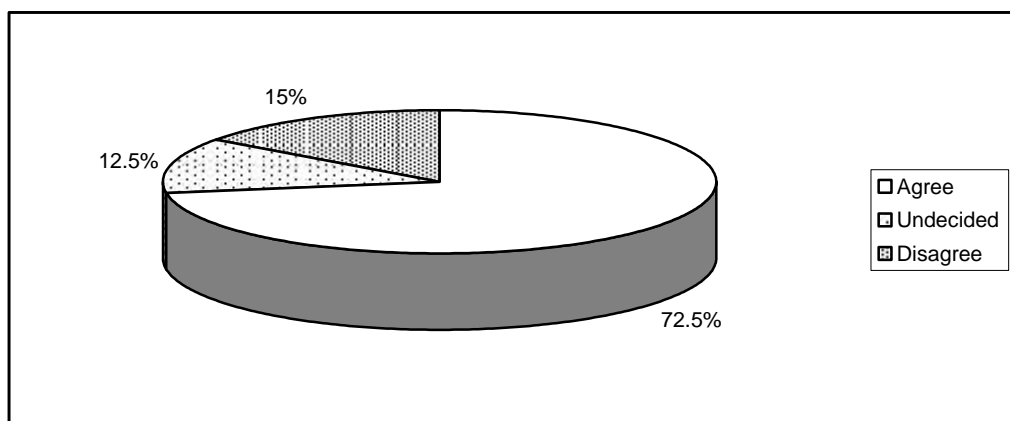
From the figure above, we can see that 72.5 per cent of the total respondents agreed with the statement, 12.5 per cent of them remained undecided and 15 per cent of them disagreed. These data show that it is challenging to keep the attention of all the students at same time in a mixed-ability class.

3.2.6 Cognitive Style of the Students

The respondents were requested to show their response to the statement 'It is difficult to teach because the students often do not understand what I mean'. It was intended to find out whether teacher face challenge because students do not understand what teachers mean or the lesson taught. The following figure shows the responses obtained from the respondents:

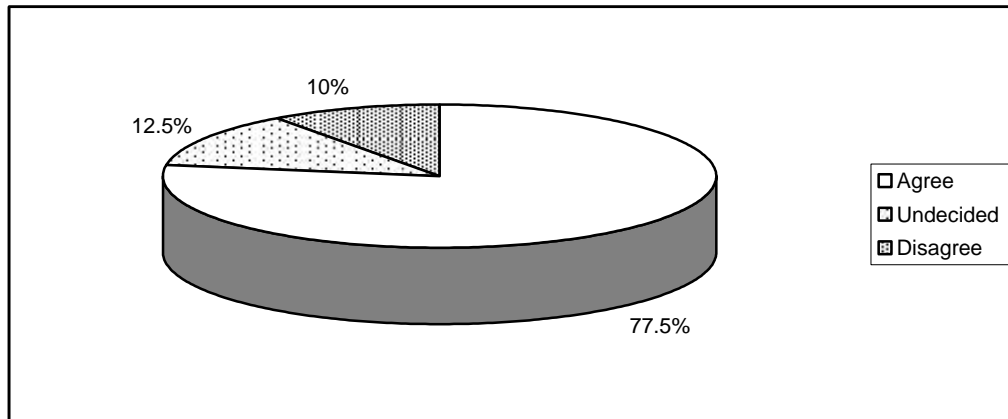**Figure No. 17**

Cognitive Style of the Students
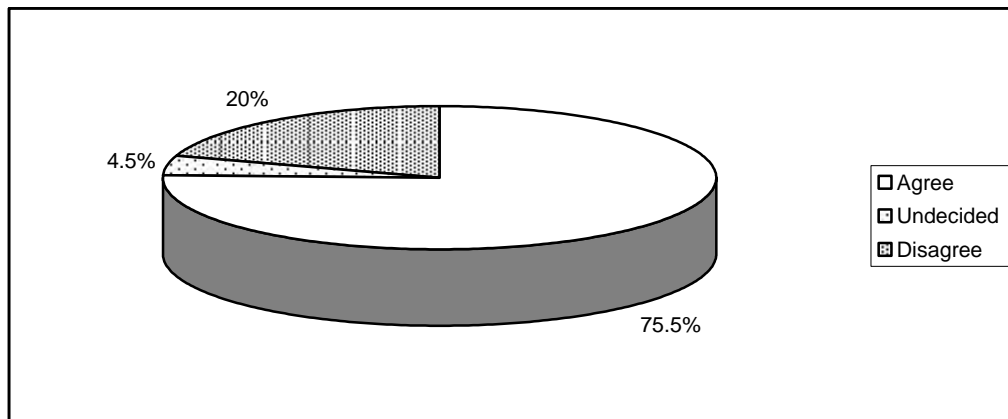
Among the total respondents 75.5 per cent agreed, 4.5 per cent marked undecided and 20 per cent disagreed with the statement. From the responses, we can deduce that majority of the teachers face problem while teaching in a mixed-ability classes because the students do not understand what teachers taught.

3.2.7 Adjusting Lesson Plans

The statement under this topic was intended to find out whether the teachers feel difficulty to adjust their lesson plans to fit the learning needs of all

individual students. The schematic presentation of the data obtained is as below:

Figure No. 18

Adjusting Lesson Plans

The data obtained showed that among the total respondents, 77.5 per cent agreed, 12.5 per cent was undecided and 10 per cent disagreed with the statement. It shows that most of the teacher faced difficulty to adjust their lesson plans to fit the learning needs of all individual students.

3.2.8   Discipline

The respondents were requested to show their responses whether the students just laugh and make a lot of noise if they do group-work. The responses obtained to this statement are schematically presented below:

Figure No. 19

Discipline
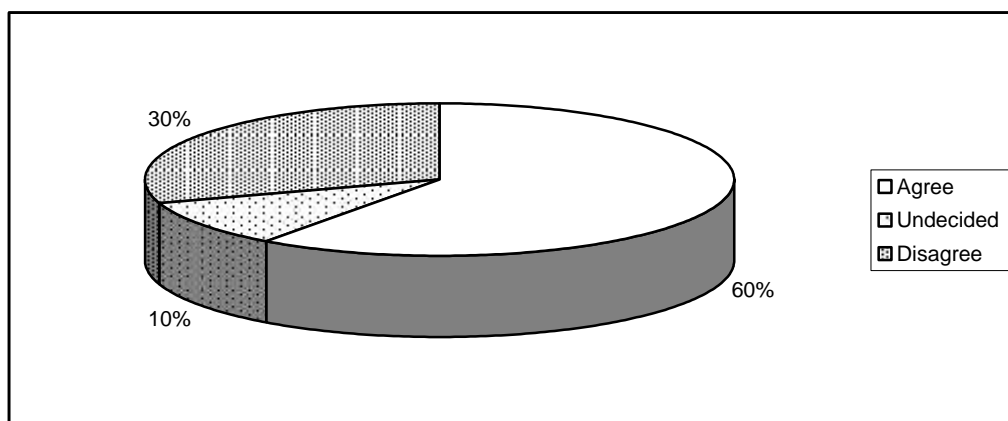
As the figure above shows, out of fourty respondents, 60 per cent agreed with the statement, 10 per cent marked undecided and 30 per cent disagreed with the statement. These responses show that noise in group-work was challenging for most of the teachers in mixed-ability classroom.

3.2.9 Limited Time Boundary

To find out whether teachers face challenge to give individual help to low achievers in a limited time boundary a statement was given to the respondents. The actual statement was 'It is difficult to give individual help to low achievers because of limited time boundary'. The responses obtained are presented n the figure below:

**Figure No. 20**

Limited Time Boundary
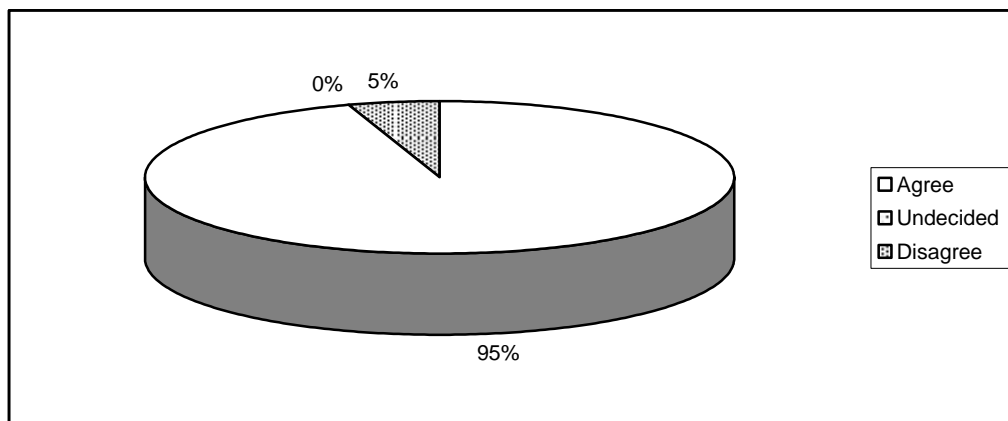
As indicated in the figure above, 95 per cent agreed with the statement, 5 per cent disagreed and none remained undecided. These data show that majority of teachers face problem to give individual help to low achievers because of limited time boundary.

3.2.10 Students' Participation

The respondents were requested to show their response to the statement which was intended to find out whether teachers face challenge to activate all the students in mixed-ability classroom. The responses obtained to this statement are presented in the figure below:

Figure No. 21

Students' Participation
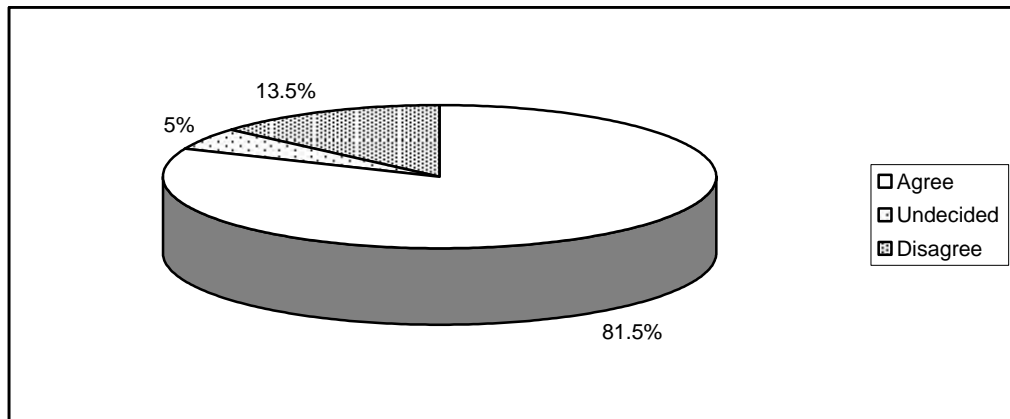
The figure above displays that 81.5 per cent of the total respondents agreed with the statement, 5 per cent was undecided and 13.5 per cent disagreed with the statement.

Since majority of the respondents agreed with the statement, it can be said that to activate all the students in mixed-ability classroom is challenging.

3.2.11 Correction and Evaluation

The statement was given to the respondents the purpose of which was to find out whether the teachers face challenge in assessing pupils work and keeping their record in mixed-ability classes. The following figure presents the data obtained to this statement from the respondents:

Figure No. 22
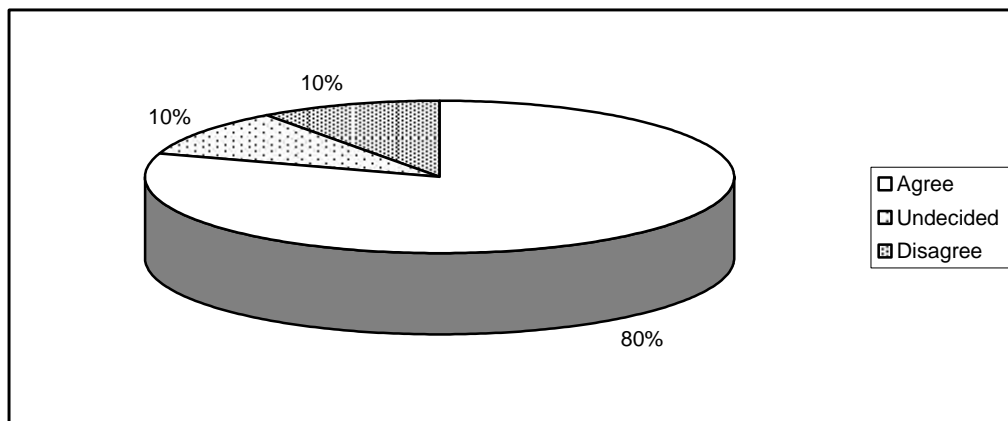
Correction and Evaluation
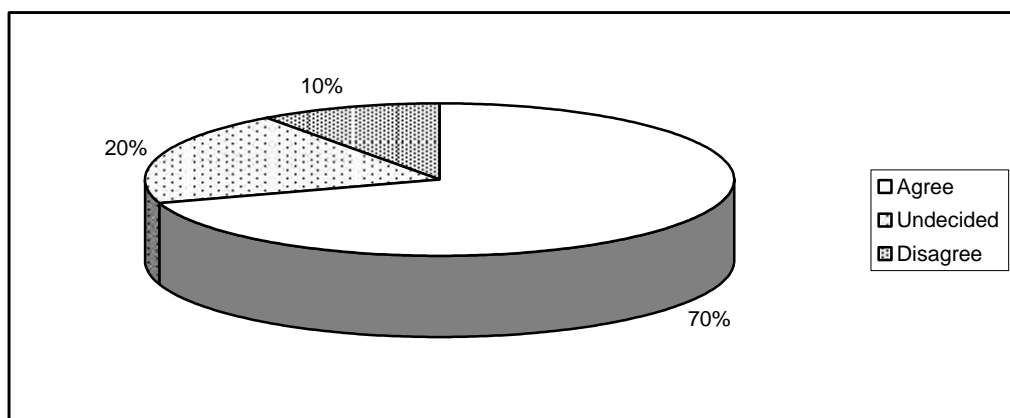
As the figure above shows, out of fourth respondents, 70 per cent agreed with the statement, 20 per cent were undecided and 10 per cent disagreed with the statement. These responses shows that most of the teachers faced problem in assessing pupils work and keeping their record in mixed-ability classes.

3.2.12 Adopting Teaching Methods and Techniques

Respondents were requested to provide their responses to whether they face problems in adapting teaching methods and techniques for all sorts of students. The responses obtained form the respondents are presented below in the figure:

Figure No. 23

**Adopting Teaching Methods and Techniques**

The data obtained showed that among the total respondents, 80 per cent agreed, 10 per cent were undecided and 10 per cent disagreed with the statement. It shows that most of the teachers faced problems in adopting teaching methods and techniques for all sorts of students.

3.2.13 Determining Individual Needs of the Students

The statement under this topic was intended to find out the respondents opinion regarding whether they feel difficulty to determine individual needs of every student or not. The schematic presentation of the data obtained is as below:

Figure No. 24

**Determining Individual Needs of the Students**
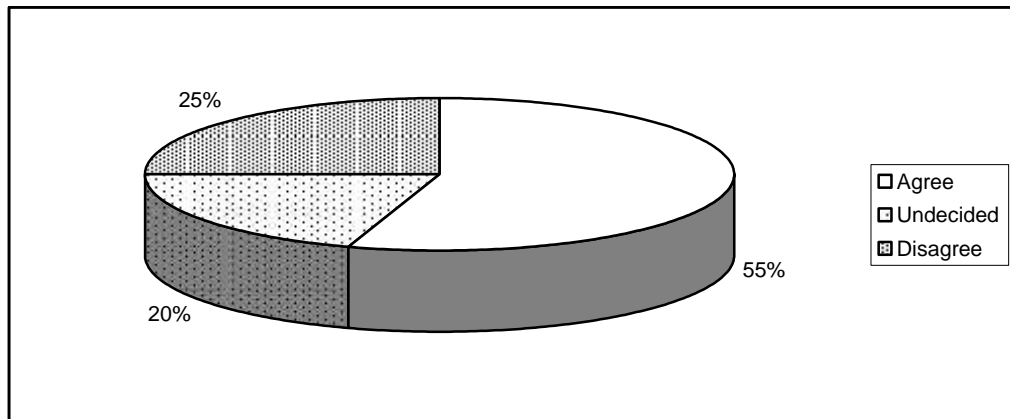
From the figure above it is clear that 55 per cent of the total respondents agreed with the statement, 20 per cent were undecided and 25 per cent disagreed with the statement. From the responses, we can conclude that determining individual needs of every student in mixed-ability classes was challenging for the teachers.

3.2.14 Repeating the Lesson for Weak Students

In order to find out whether repeating the lesson for weak students is problematic in mixed-ability classes, a statement was given to them. The statement was 'It is problematic to repeat the lesson for weak students. Their responses to this statement are presented in the figure below:

Figure No. 25

**Repeating the Lesson for Weak Students**
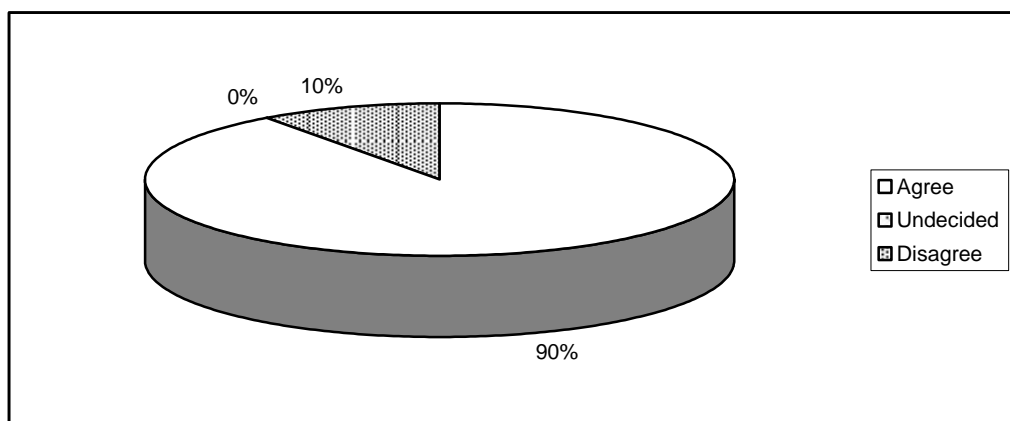
Among the total respondents, 90 per cent agreed, 10 per cent disagreed and no one was undecided. It shows that repeating the lesson for weak students is problematic in mixed-ability classes.

3.2.15 Boredom Among the Students

The statement in this topic was intended to find out teachers' opinion regarding the learners' boredom in mixed-ability class. The statement was the students of low level lose their self-esteem while students of high level feel bored in mixed-ability group'. The schematic presentation of the data obtained is given below:

Figure No. 26

Boredom Among the Students
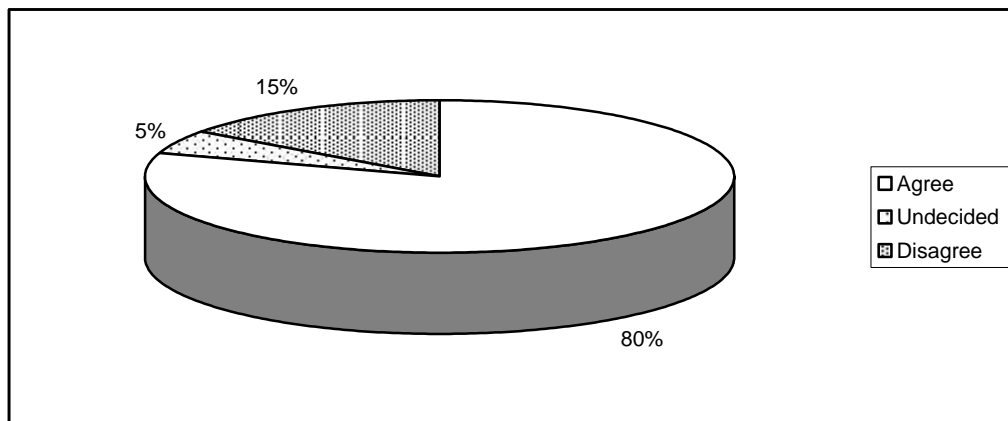
The figure above displays that out of forty respondents, 80 per cent agreed, 5 per cent was undecided and 15 per cent disagreed with the statement. These responses indicated that the students of low level lost their self-esteem while students of high level felt bored in mixed-ability group.

3.3   Challenges Faced by Teachers

The respondents were requested to mention any other challenges that they had faced while teaching in mixed-ability classroom. An open ended question was used for this. They are presented below:

1.   All the students did not understand the instruction equally due to their varied level of proficiency.

2. Paying individual attention was difficult due to the limited time boundary.

3. Only more proficient students were active and less proficient students feel hesitant and lose the opportunity. Activating the quite students is very difficult in such classes.

4. Bright pupils felt bored because they have already known what the teacher teaches in the class, keeping all the students interested is also challenging.

5. It was very difficult to maintain a balance between low achievers and bright pupils.

6. Deciding appropriate level of input according to their level and need was challenging.

7. Spending to much time with the slow learners was challenging.

8. Keeping the attention of all the students at same time was challenging.

9. The students just talk, laugh, and make noise in group-work.

10. It was difficult to determine individual needs of every student and help them accordingly.

11. Repeating the same lesson for weak students was problematic.

12. More proficient students disturb the less proficient students as they feel themselves superior.

13. The students of low level lose their self Esteem and it was difficult to ensure their participation in the activities.

14. Adapting same techniques and methods for all sorts of students was challenging.

15. It was difficult to adjust the lesson plans to fit the learning needs of all individual students.

16. Ensuring effective learning for all was challenging.

17. Mixed-ability classrooms were difficult to control.

18. Adapting homogeneous textbooks and materials for all sorts of students and tailoring to their individual needs was challenging for a teacher.

3.4   Strategies Adopted for Coping with the Challenges

The respondents were requested to mention the strategies that they adopted for coping with the challenges they face in mixed-ability classes. The strategies as mentioned by the teachers are presented below:

1. Use of simple language
2. Group works, pair works and ability grouping.
3. Special attention to the less proficient students.
4. Involving different students in different activities.
5. Using various methods, texts and topics.
6. Encouraging students for self-learning.
7. Providing equal opportunity to all.
8. Encouraging all students to participate in the tasks and activities.
9. Helping the learners take responsibility
10. Learning through fun
11. Use of students' mother tongue.
12. Use of extra materials
13. Revision and repetition.
14. More exercises for more proficient students.
15. Using more-proficient students as models.
16. Encouraging students to read before the lesson.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, the findings of the research are drawn on the basis of the analysis and interpretation of the data. Some recommendations are also listed for further study.

4.1 Findings

From the analysis and interpretation of the information obtained, I have drawn the following findings:

a.   The secondary level English teaches were familiar with the concept of mixed-ability classroom and they take their classes as mixed-ability group.

b.   Individual differences lead mixed-ability classroom. Almost all ELT classes had students who are at different level of language proficiency and greater difference among them appear when there are more students in the class.

c.   Mixed-ability classrooms were complex and time consuming. Teacher face challenge of spending too much time with the slow learners.

d.   It was very difficult to decide what kind of instruction and task is appropriate for the students. Majority of the teachers felt difficulty to teach the same kind of material to all the students.

e.   It was difficult to adjust the lesson plans to fit the learning needs of every individual students in mixed-ability classroom.

f.   Majority of the teachers faced problem to give individual help to low achievers because of limited time boundary.

g.   To activate all the students in mixed-ability classroom was challenging to teachers. Less proficienent students felt hesitant to participate.

h.   Repeating the lesson for weak student was problematic in mixed-ability classroom.

i.   In mixed-ability classes, collaborative activities such as group work, pair work were significant to cope with the challenges.

j.   Giving more exercise to the more proficient students and encouraging learners for self-learning were very important strategies in mixed-ability classes.

4.2   Recommendations

Based on my research findings, I have offered the following recommendations for the pedagogical implications:

a.   Every ELT classe are of mixed-ability. So, the teacher should accept mixed-ability group in ELT classroom as natural phenomenon.

b.   There are students with varied language proficiency in mixed-ability classes. Therefore, the teachers need to devise different levels of activities for addressing different students' needs.

c.   The teachers should recognize the students' strengths and weaknesses and plan lesson accordingly.

d.   The language used by the teachers in the classroom should be comprehensible to all the students so that all kinds of students can be benefited from the teachers' instruction.

e.   Collaborative activities such as group work, pair work, project work are very helpful in mixed-ability classes.

f.   The teachers should give more exercise the more proficient students and encourage them for self- learning. Low achievers should be given class work and homework according to their level and ability.

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