



## Classroom Observation: A Diversity Analysis at MVA Secondary Boarding School

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to understand how does diversity in a classroom influence the rapport building with the teacher and its impact in the learning behavior of a student. On top of this, this paper aims to analyze the divergence in teacher's teaching style as a leader in the classroom because the facilitation style often transitions based on the different parameters within a classroom. This study follows a participant observation method along with qualitative design to understand the lived experience of the teachers at Mahendra Vidya Ashram (MVA) secondary boarding school. In-depth interviews have been taken after observation of two classes and those have been transcribed, coded and followed by a thematic analysis with two themes. The findings of this study disclosed that culture is defined by their upbringing and what beliefs, values and norms students strongly adhere to. This creates a strong connection to the roots and students are conversant with similar scenario accordingly. A student with a discrete culture is guided by confrontational philosophy that encourages extroversion ultimately contributing in rapport building with teacher and in contrary the opposite. The recommendation of this research is that diversity issues could be solved through curriculum diversification, teacher training and professional development, equitable access to resources, community

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## Introduction

Observing a class has always been on my catalogue of action. The primary reason behind the observation is to understand the diversity in terms of demographics, culture, psychographics, intelligence and also to understand modus operandi of a teacher as a leader (Bhandari & Dhakal, 2022; Lavigne et al., 2022). As a teacher myself, there was a shimmering want to know how others deliver the lectures, manage the class and navigate throughout the session. A teacher facilitating the class is ultimately responsible to address each and every concern of the students as a leader. The followers tend to go as per the direction and pathway set by the leader, in the same way, students are supposed to and actually perform it (Callens, 2023). In general sense, a class is a cohort that comprises of a wide array of people from diverse background, culture, tradition, gender, ethnicity, language, race and tribe. Each of them carries their discrete essence of communication etiquette, mannerism, learning style, and the like.

The purpose of this observation is to understand the impact of culture when it comes to building a relationship with the teacher. Teacher and student hold an undue influence upon each other as they have a fiduciary relationship, i.e., one is dependent upon another (Endedijk et al., 2022; García-Rodríguez et al., 2023; Platz, 2021). In this case, a student solely relies on the teacher concerning knowledge attainment. In this context, an amicable relationship between the teacher and student creates an affirmative learning environment and encourages both of them. However, a distasteful relationship in-between them ultimately hinders the performance in the period to come.

This paper aims to explore a set of aspects of observation in the class such as teacher student interaction, feedback, learning environment, cultural diversity, leadership style of a teacher, use of instructional methods, medium of instruction and classroom management. These aspects contribute in creating a diversity in the class and the observation would be centered on the afore-mentioned parameters to have a holistic understanding of diversity in education.

## Objectives of the Study

- I. To understand how does a culture influences the rapport with the teacher
- II. To explore the performance diversity and its impact in the learning process
- III. To analyze the divergence in teacher's teaching style as a leader in the classroom

## Methodology and Research Design

To understand the diversity, the researcher underwent two class observation, i.e., science class of 9<sup>th</sup> grade and social studies class of 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Direct observation has been done in context of class and the following table has been used to clearly articulate the observation aspects and outcomes. The researcher was physical present in the classroom and witnessed the teaching activities, student's engagement, behaviors, instructional methods, impact of cultural background in building relation with the teacher and documented them properly. Before conducting the observation, I took the consent from the Principal of the school.

**Table 1**

*Table Showing Observation Method in the Classroom*

| Grade Level                    | Subject                   | Observation Aspects                                                                | Observation Notes                        |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Grade 8 <sup>th</sup> Students | Social Studies            | -Economic diversity -<br>Cultural diversity<br>-Teacher's performance<br>diversity | As described in the<br>upcoming segments |
| Grade 9 <sup>th</sup> Students | Science and<br>Technology | -Neuro-diversity<br>-Gender diversity<br>-Career Goals                             | As described in the<br>upcoming segments |

The diversity in a class could also be diagnosed from the dimension of a teacher in terms of their teaching style. It has been found that a teacher diverges their teaching style with respect to the classroom diversity. Thus, in-depth interview with two teachers have been conducted; their lived experience is comprehended and the diversity in terms of their teaching style along with factors behind the causes has been drawn out.

To facilitate this, a phenomenological design has been followed. Likewise, the data collected from the interview has been transcribed, coded (open, axial and selective) that has ultimately contributed in thematic analysis.

The in-depth interview with the teacher 'A' in science class was transcribed and coded into 9 different codes. After the coding process, the researcher enlisted the codes and arranged them into different categories. Out of those categories, to make it more specific, few themes were generated like, "context-based teaching style", "extroverted teaching in supportive environment", and "tailoring teaching to



interpersonal dynamics”. The relevant themes were combined and a new theme has been generated, i.e., “Rapport-Dependent Teaching Style”.

Furthermore, after having an interview with teacher ‘B’ in social studies class, the same thematic analysis process has been followed, i.e., the researcher transcribed the interview and coded into 11 different codes. Eventually, the codes were enlisted and collated into different groups or categories. Out of those categories, to make it more specific, few themes were generated like, “jack-of-all trades teaching in class”, “teaching chameleon”, “do good, I be good”, “flip-flop teacher” and “performance-driven teaching style”. The relevant themes were combined and a new theme has been generated, i.e., “Mood Ring Teaching”.

## Findings and Results

It’s 8:00 in the morning on 22<sup>nd</sup> of February and the weather was chilly. I was excited to go to the school, however, now, as a researcher. The sky was overcast and it was about to rain heavily. I had already summoned one of my friends who runs a secondary boarding school in Suryabinayak, Bhaktapur and he scheduled a time for it. Also, my assignment of MPhil was due which was supposed to be completed through two class observations and in-depth interview that involved processes like transcription and coding. So, I got all my enthusiasm up and went to Bhaktapur. As I reached the school, my friend was already waiting at the school administration. I had a quick discussion regarding my objectives behind conducting the class observation with a cup of coffee. Eventually after half an hour, I went straight up to the class.

MVA Secondary Boarding school is a family-run academic institution in Bhaktapur which is in operation for more than two decades. The three generation from the same family have been in the service. The school is somehow a popular one amid the locality as most of the children from middle-class economy category go to this school. While entering the school, the premises were big enough to accommodate a large number of people. The school being located at Bhaktapur is one of the reasons behind having such humongous compound. After having our vehicles parked, it already sparked a sense of diversity on our mind. As a part of our assignment, we were asked to observe classes and observing the two classes of the secondary level, several diversity facets have been found. The following table portrays the results in a diagrammatic form.

### Class Observation 1

#### Table 2

*Table showing observation details in science classroom*



| Grade Level                    | Subject        | Observation Aspects                                                         |
|--------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Students | Social Studies | Economic diversity<br>Cultural diversity<br>Teacher's performance diversity |

### Observation Notes

At 11:45 AM, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students commence their social studies class which is taught by a teacher who partially works as an active member of a political party. Moreover, the teacher justifies the role of teaching social studies as he started the lesson “Organs of Government” by explaining the basic difference between legislation, executive and judiciary with relevant current affairs. He also connected the theories of Karl Marx as an economist theory and Aristotle’s theory as a natural theory. In relation to the communism theory, he divides the class into two different segments where one group argues ‘for’ and another ‘against’ the motion. The ‘for’ argues on the need of free market economy, liberalization, better inflation rate, management of price level index, time value of money and the like. Similarly, the other group argues ‘against’ the motion on the need of capitalism as it brings up capital-intensive goods which is crucial in development of a nation, trade barriers to protect domestic industries, and legitimate operation of MNCs in Nepal. In this scenario, a distinct diversity could be observed within the class in terms of economy.

Furthermore, a cultural diversity could be observed as the classroom had a blend of students from a wide array of ethnic community like Newar, Gurung, Limbu, Chhetri, Bramhan, Baniya and Madhesi. A unity and an integration in-between the students can be seen as they actively participated in the classroom activities. However, students from the Mongolian community were found to be more interactive and extroverted in contrast to students from Bramhin community. After interrogating students who were more participative and active, it was found that they live in a joint family and often meet for a liquor party in the evening. They also hold more of an outgoing personality which let them talk with teachers without any hesitance. It has helped them build a good relationship with the teachers.

In the contrary, the Bramhins were found to be reserved and rather focused on their studies only. Some of them had an aim of getting into the bureaucracy as their family members have been civil servants. Also, they disclosed that interaction is very minimal in their family.

It can be observed that some new teachers initially display positive qualities such as motivation, appreciation, guidance, friendly communication, and a supportive attitude. However, after officially taking



up the role, there are instances where their approach gradually changes, and students begin to notice less encouraging behaviors. In this context, a program coordinator from the school shared: *“I have seen teachers changing colors abruptly, even within a week. Generally, we organize an induction session or a trial teaching period to observe their teaching style and most importantly the response of the students. It has been found sometimes that teachers tend to be super-good during the first couple of days as they want to get retained in the job and suddenly change their behavior, which has made students perplexed. In such situations, we are not able to change the teacher, i.e., during the mid-course.”*

This statement suggests that, in some cases, teachers may alter their teaching style after being appointed. Such changes can affect students' expectations, as the experience they receive may differ from what they initially observed during the induction or trial period (Haugard, 2022). As a result, students may feel confused or disappointed when the classroom environment changes unexpectedly (Goleman, 2013). Eventually, such behavior also does not ensure stagnant performance of the leaders. Analyzing the students' dissatisfaction towards a teacher, one of the students shared: “We are not satisfied with the teaching style. On day one, it was nice and we thought the teacher would remain supportive, however, the sudden change in their behavior has made us stunned. Changing the teacher at this moment would only affect us as the exams are near”.

There is no effort for the collective progress but a vested-interest to prioritize own goals and ambitions (Jones & Paulhus, 2014). Such teacher not only fails to contribute in the growth of the follower but also has chances of getting the institution down the drain.

## Class Observation 2

**Table 3**

*Table showing observation details in science classroom*

| Grade Level                    | Subject                | Observation Aspects                                 |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 9 <sup>th</sup> Grade students | Science and Technology | Neuro-diversity<br>Gender diversity<br>Career Goals |



## Observation Notes

At 9:30 AM precise, the 9<sup>th</sup> grade students start their day with a class of Science and Technology which happens to be one of the important periods taught by their academic incharge.

As they were already done with their syllabus by this year, a thorough revision was going on.

While observing one full period, students with a regular state of understanding were found. However, there was also a presence of students diagnosed with autism, PTSD and one with dyslexia. A major proportion of females were present in the class along with a self-claimed “gay” that represented a gender diversity. In terms of career goals, it was astonishing to know that they wanted to become journalist, content creator, cricketer and an actor which is totally in contrast to the aspirational career goals that we used to have in our school days that limited us to being a lawyer, banker, doctor or an engineer.

## Thematic Analysis (Diversity in Teacher’s Teaching and Leadership Style)

After observing the diversity nature of students in the class based on different parameters like culture, ethnicity, gender, career, psychology, and economy, I also went through an indepth interview to understand the divergence in the teaching and leadership style of teachers as they tend to transition from one style to another. A thematic analysis has been done and two themes have been created which are described in the upcoming segments.

### Rapport-Dependent Teaching Style

Teaching style varies in accordance to the relationship that is built with the followers. Although, one specific leadership style is popular and perceived as a unanimous approach, the teacher tends to change the style based on the proximity they hold with their followers. In this context, a university teacher ‘A’ who has been playing a role of leader in his specific subject department shared his experience: “My teaching style varies with respect to the students that hop into my session. Every year, I welcome three sessions of students, however, the same kind of energy could not be matched. Sometimes, if they are unwilling to share a common bond, I play a quiet leadership role and if I build a good rapport, I play an extroverted leadership role, thus, it entirely depends”. From this conviction, it can be understood that the teacher’s teaching style diverges in relation to the rapport quotient that he builds with his students. It is evident that a person becomes extrovert where there is a comfortable ambience and when the frequency resonates with another person. Analyzing the high participation ratio of the students in his class, the college principal disclosed:



“Teacher ‘A’ goes with the flow, irrespective of the class size, the psychographics of the students, he easily blends with the class as per the situation”.

Rapport building is crucial for a leader to get accustomed with the followers as it aims for a long-term succession (Goleman et al., 2013). The teacher sometimes exerts the style depending upon the rapport quotient with the followers.

### **Mood Ring Diversity in Teaching**

A teacher is required to inspire the followers through motivation, leading by example and self-practice to get the job done. Oftentimes, the teacher holds a positional authority in an organizational setting, not always, but most of the times. During the course, they anticipate a good performance that is sign of potential chances in achieving the goals. In this context, a university teacher ‘B’ shared: “Performance is the key and it matters a lot to me as a teacher. I ensure that the students abide by their academic objectives as it not only helps them to secure good results but also in holistic learning. I become a stringent teacher when they are not performing well and an amicable one if they are doing well”. From this statement, it could be understood that a teacher transitions from being a transformational leader to a transactional leader based on the performance of their followers. Having a conversation with the principal of the college, he added: “Teacher ‘B’ focuses on performance and act accordingly. It is necessary because students in the present context tend to get distracted and continuation of same leadership style could not be relevant, thus, the transition has been fruitful”.

Specific goals are to be set by the teacher for effective performance of the students and it is important to monitor and transition accordingly (Northhouse, 2018). Out of the wide array of colors, mood ring refers to the emotions that is related to a leader and exerts according to the performance factor.

### **Connection with Theoretical Ideas of Diversity**

Power dynamics play a vital role within the social structure and applies in terms of demographics as well. The theory of power as propounded by Michael Foucault highlights that power is not exactly authoritative or imposed by a top-down approach within a structural system. In fact, power is omnipresent within all relationships and it can be formulated from the bottom of a pyramid as well (Haugaard, 2022). Power does not repress or obstruct; however, it is instrumental in production of knowledge, values, norms and etiquette. For example, a decision made by a court is not simply a legal remedy but it constructs ideas regarding what should not be done and is punishable by the law.



Power is pervasive in nature; however, Foucault challenges this conviction. If power is taken hand in hand with leadership, despite the universal nature of power, it can be always sub judicated or resisted through activism, civil war, or other alternative actions (Callens & Alaktif, 2023). This implies that power has a diverse nature as per the time, situation and necessity.

Effective leadership requires an active involvement of team members and robust coordination. Knowledge construction is extremely crucial during problem-solving and in crisis management. A teacher who can guide, mentor and offer resources will help the members build skill and competencies through challenges. Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) was introduced by Lev Vygotsky to understand the gap between the individual competency and synergy. An effective teacher addresses the ZPD and undergoes scaffolding which provides that the teacher provides temporary support to learners on activities which are beyond their competencies.

Diverged teaching style somehow could be connected with the theory of contingent leadership or situational leadership where the leader exhibits such style with respect to the need of the specific circumstances and followers (Banks, 2004). It rejects the principle of 'one-size-fits-all' approach as the leader is supposed to adapt to the environment where he is operating.

This ensures flexibility, attunement of follower's need, abilities, and preferences.

The concept of diversity in education can be interlinked with constructivism which is a philosophical perspective propounded by Lev Vygotsky. It provides that learners construct their understanding when they are exposed to the environment and undergo an incessant level of interaction (Burbules, 2009). It is derived from the concept of cognitive psychology and ensures that knowledge is to be gained through interaction by the learners themselves as the involvement leads to creation of new ideas and also urges the sharing culture. For example, an effective teacher exhibiting leadership is required to encourage in-person activities such as group discussion, project appraisal, etc., which is supposed to be completed in order to gain skills such as communication, decision-making and persuasion. It can also be related with the system theory as the processing (class activities) based on raw materials (resources, materials) results into a generation of significant level of outcomes (achievement, performance).

In order to foster empowerment, critical thinking is a must and it also promulgates the social justice (Hooks, 1994). The concept of critical pedagogy is often taken as a challenge to the banking model as provided by Paulo Freire. In relation to the critical theory, it challenges the banking model of education that is centralized on a one-way flow of knowledge, as compared to banks; receiving, sorting and storing deposits.



It is an analogy to understand that the teacher is not limited to inflow the knowledge into the mind of a learner, however, they shall encourage the students to challenge the ideas, achieve self-awareness through introspection and transform their learning pattern (Greene, 1986). The learners should not be the passive recipients of the knowledge provided by the teacher, however, should be able to critically analyze and interpret it accordingly which can be assured by a planned curriculum. A good teacher ensures the implication of critical pedagogy in his/her classroom.

Problem-solving and decision-making skills are essentials of a teacher. The pragmatism theory given by John Dewey primarily focuses on enhancing the hard skills (Shook, 2023). As the word suggests, it ensures that the learner gains practical skills in the due course during their study period. A teacher has to be responsible for crafting a progressive and realistic experience for his/her follower, in this case, a teacher shall be accountable for their student under these grounds (Jackson, 2011). It is said that students are the pillars of the nation, thus, they have to undergo several novice experiences in their further lifetime which could be obstructive if they become indecisive at the moment. To address such potential issues, a teacher indulges a set of insights that helps in gaining different experiences that activate their both laterals of the brain,

i.e., creativity and academics. For instance, etiquette, communication, persuasion, decisionmaking, etc. are few of the life skills that a teacher is supposed to ensure.

The wave of post-modernism in education was initiated in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century that focused on subjectivity, flexibility and responsiveness in the curriculum. The post-modern approach in the context to leadership claims that the teacher should be dynamic as per the need of the environment, i.e., it should not static or remain constant (Maker & Nielson, 1996). It shall be customized with respect to the time, requirement, circumstances and market scenario. For instance, a teacher encouraging the use of technology, appreciating subjective opinions, creativity, adaptability, flexibility, empowerment and embracing diversity within their classroom justifies the flavor of post-modernism in the curriculum. The students get what they want and how they visualize themselves in their potential professional career.

## Conclusion

While undergoing the class observation, our horizon got broadened as the diversity in the classroom could be observed from different aspects like culture, gender, performance, psychographics, demographics, economy and career pathways. Each individual holds a discrete set of idealism and its impact has also been drawn out. In relation to the purpose and objective of the study, all three potential aims have been met, i.e.,



the impact of culture, performance and varied teaching style in the learning behavior and classroom environment. Students that have a robust extroverted personality that is guided by certain culture were found to be intimate with teachers. In the same way, the teachers' transition from one style to another was also observed which is an interesting aspect of diversity in education. This assignment was extremely fruitful in building our hard skills and soft skills such as communication, decision-making, and critical analysis. In order to address such diversity issues, proper empirical research studies are important time and again as the contextual relevance keeps on changing because of its dynamic nature. On top of this, these diversity issues could be resolved by having curriculum diversification, teacher training and professional development, equitable access to resources, community engagement like this type of observations and constant monitoring and evaluation.

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