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Positioning, Power, and Resistance: English Language Learners' Identity Construction in Nepali Public Higher Education Classroom Discourse

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Abstract

English language classes are a significant context for learners to develop their identities and negotiate their voices and power relations. This study explores how English language learners positioned themselves in the English language classroom and constructed their identity through the lens of positioning, power, and resistance. We collected data by observing classroom interactions, followed by informal conversations and focus group discussions with 17 students (10 women and 7 men) whose mother tongue was Nepali. Drawing Kumaravadivelu's (1999) critical classroom discourse analysis (CCDA, we conducted this study at a public campus in Nepal, focusing on a speaking course offered as part of higher-education minors in English. The results demonstrated how students constructed multiple positions, enacted resistance, and negotiated the unequal distribution of power between their and the teachers' voices in classroom interaction. This study shows that identity formation in classroom dialogic discourse is influenced by power dynamics, student positioning, resistance, and the hegemony of language. Through teacher and peer groups, students learn to negotiate power and dependence relations that allow or deny their voices, identities, and feelings of worthiness to emerge as they learn English as a foreign language. The findings show that classroom conversations are both a catalyst and a challenge in developing learners' identities. Therefore, English language teachers need to aim to create dialogic learning environments and encourage culturally sensitive pedagogical practices, which help students feel valued as individuals with their own interests and identities as language learners.

Keywords: *learner identity, positioning, critical classroom discourse analysis, role-plays, Nepal*

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Introduction

An extensive discussion of how learners' identities affect their learning experiences and outcomes, including their verbal and non-verbal knowledge, power, resistance, and social phenomena, is evident in the existing literature (Crystal, 2013; Kramsch, 2014; Tong & Cheung, 2011). The studies show learner identity negotiation as an ongoing process within the learning environment. Students negotiate their status, exert control, and resist dominant norms and practices. This study draws on Early and Norton's (2012) account of the components that

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constitute classroom language dynamics and Baker's (2014) notion of the broader dynamics of teaching and learning interaction. It explores how classroom interaction supports English language learners' identity construction. While existing research has examined the dichotomy of non-native students, the processes through which English language learners form identities in classroom discourse require further exploration.

Positioning, power relations, and resistance offer useful lenses for exploring how students negotiate and construct their identities within English language classroom discourse. van Dijk (2013) stated that discourse is a resource for understanding and representing the world. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) also takes into account issues of power and dominance. CDA reveals and assesses relations of dominance and resistance, and sets standards for how people can critique these issues (Sharma & Phyak, 2017). Students use discourse to negotiate their identity by positioning themselves within the school environment. They use this to negotiate roles and responsibilities with teachers and peers (Dumlao & Tian, 2020).

The need to diversify classroom instruction to align with institutional objectives has shifted attention away from student learning, thereby affecting their identities as learners (Neupane, 2023). Students can exercise agency and passively resist the dominant narrative by choosing specific language codes (Dumlao & Tian, 2020). The relationship between teachers and students in the classroom is closely related to power. Merriam et al. (2001) posit that awareness of power is not only essential but also a matter of negotiation.

Teacher-student power dynamics, interactions, learning, and overall experience. Students form perceptions of the teachers' and peers' power and influence over them (Clarke et al., 2017). When engaging with the course material and each other, learners may confront their understanding of who holds the power and who is subjected to it.

Students who express who they are and question the status quo are generating opposition. Power resides in the dominant group and is used to control subordinates (Raby, 2005), and they may resist this by choosing certain words to use, how much they participate, and how engaged they are in the curriculum (Winkler & Rybnikova, 2024). This gives students an opportunity to show their personality and culture, which are important parts of their identity.

Learning another language and its culture can be complex, especially in an intercultural teaching and learning environment in Nepal. Other languages are often used alongside English for instruction (Phyak & Sah, 2024). English-medium instruction is becoming more popular in education (Dearden, 2018). Many universities offer undergraduate and postgraduate courses in English (Wingrove et al., 2026). Students from Nepal aim to learn English. However, many issues face English language learners in Nepal. English learners often lack the opportunity to use the language, feel passive, experience language interference, and are reluctant to speak in class. This is often attributed to the traditional classroom culture, where teachers are seen as authority figures. This can create a power imbalance that affects how much students can participate and be heard, and, in turn, how they can form their identities as English learners. Therefore, it is important to understand how English language learners are situated within classroom discourse and how they interact with teachers and peers using power relations. This study attempts to address this issue by exploring positioning, power relations, and resistance in English language classroom discourse in Nepal.

This study explores English language learners' identity construction using Critical Classroom Discourse Analysis (Kumaravadivelu, 1999). The study aimed at addressing the following research questions:

> Q1. How do positioning, power, and resistance in classroom discourse contribute to identity construction in English language learners?

Q2. How do English language learners negotiate teacher authority, peer influence, and hegemonic language and cultural practices in classroom discourse?

Identity of a Learner

Identity usually refers to an individual's feeling of self. The phrases "self," "role," "positioning," "subject position," and "subjectivity" are often used to elucidate multiple aspects of identity (Durbidge, 2026; Karimpour et al., 2026). A learner's identity is widely recognized as socially constructed and subject to change. A person's engagement with the larger social environment has established a dominant identity and influences their perspective on themselves and their relationships (MacFarlane, 2018). In the literature, the term 'learner identity' refers to the relationship between individuals and their evolution. Wenger (2000) states that identities should not be viewed as things that are named, such as racial groups, titles, or personality tests. Identities are a feeling of being or not being a particular kind of person. Relationships are formed through mutual interaction among individuals, love, shared responsibilities, and shared past experiences (MacFarlane, 2018). To learn a language, one has to adopt a more complex identity with multiple dimensions. An individual may possess multiple identities related to their gender and to their role as a language learner.

Learner identity is defined by Lawson (2014) as resources for constructing belonging, recognition of self and others, and context management (what I am, where, with whom, and when). Kolb and Kolb (2009) provided an alternative interpretation of learning identity, asserting that individuals with a learning identity perceive themselves as learners, actively seek and engage in life experiences with a learning-oriented mindset, and maintain confidence in their capacity to learn. This defines an individual's entire identity as a learner, in contrast to merely a segment of it.

Speech serves as a linguistic manifestation of an individual's identity from a sociocultural standpoint. Researchers who view classrooms as social and cultural environments marked by ongoing power dynamics and ideological conflicts, including poststructuralists and social constructivists, argue that identity and the contextualized use of language in the classroom are interrelated (Luk, 2008). In the present study, the terms "language learners" and "English language learners" are used interchangeably. The learner identity in the study by Lawson (2014) refers to one's self-image as a learner and his/her place within a learning environment. This can be attributed to learners' intrinsic motivation, a sense of belonging, positive reinforcement and support from peers and teachers, and past learning experiences. We argue that these factors are shaped through everyday classroom interactions, where learners negotiate recognition, authority, and belonging. Thus, this study explored how identities are constructed by considering power dynamics and resistance within a language learning context.

Resistance and Power in Language Classrooms

The classroom is a sociolinguistic situation for this study. It is a context in which power dynamics exist, and individuals negotiate their identities and roles within the institution. In multilingual and multicultural settings, there can be pressure on individuals to adopt certain linguistic practices and identities. Blackledge (2008) argues that individuals may occupy powerful positions that are difficult to refuse, thereby displaying non-negotiable identities in certain educational contexts. In classroom discourse, Lawson (2014) posits that students' agency and power frequently manifest as resistance to the socially and authoritatively valued institutional discourse. Brooks (2016), building on Foucault's (1980) concepts of institutional discipline and human resistance, argues that learners' resistance in classroom interactions is directed not at the teacher but at the established, normative rituals expected in educational settings. Resistance in language acquisition has been widely investigated (Dufva & Aro, 2015;

Wassell et al., 2010), as it emerges when students initiate negotiations over participation in classroom discussions (Sapkota, 2024). Classroom interactions vary according to the subject matter and the classroom environment (van Lier, 2008). This may result in multiple methods for recognizing learner agency and the dynamics of power relations characterized by "inequality," "neutrality," or "equality" (van Dijk, 2013).

Language learning classrooms are the asymmetrical distribution of responsibilities between teachers and learners, rather than an equal allocation (Walsh, 2011). Similarly, McCloskey (2008) states that discourse is essentially composed of three things: power, knowledge, and truth. This indicates that discursive structures function as mechanisms of power and control, constraining individuals' ability to think beyond their confines. Wiseman (2012) posits that resistance represents a deterministic interpretation of power relations. An issue that occurs when students state their opinions about others is that they impose their views on them. This can cause some learners to become resistant (Edwards, 1991; Tananuraksakul, 2011). Resistance can affect language production in the interaction stage. Student resistance in classroom interaction became a key issue for CCDA (Kumaravadivelu, 1999). This provides a philosophical stance and approach to exploring how positioning, power relations, and resistance can be applied in class.

Critical Classroom Discourse Analysis (CCDA) as a Theoretical Referent

Classroom discourse is a key aspect of teacher practice, student engagement, knowledge building, and power relations. In the past, classroom interaction was studied through the structure of teacher-student interaction. There is less focus on other sociocultural factors that influence classroom interaction. Kumaravadivelu (1999) critiques traditional classroom interaction and discourse analyses. He questions the ways these have been defined and used in research. This leads to an understanding of classroom discourse that goes beyond what can be observed in classroom interaction. Understanding how teaching is implemented by considering the effects of practice, institutional structures, and power imbalances provides a clearer understanding of how teaching and learning occur. He suggests using CCDA to study how students develop, affect, and make sense of classroom discourse as a social, political, and historical reality.

The discourse process also helps us understand that power can originate from various sources and is not always rooted in repression (Foucault, 1980). Considering this, resistance is a fundamental aspect of power dynamics that frequently occurs in interpersonal interactions (Rau, 2005). Tian and Singhasiri (2016) assert that students could exercise power in a way that would allow them to be both proactive and active by acting on their supervisor's empowering guidance and reactive by following their strict instructions. In classroom interactions, educators foster students' ability to dissect prevailing discourses and counter-discourses by raising issues at the intersections of ideology, power, knowledge, class, racism, and gender (Kumaravadivelu, 1999). The post-structural and postcolonial discourse views provide the framework for defining the nature, scope, and methodology of CCDA.

We chose CCDA as the analytical framework for the study for two reasons. At first, it concentrates on the remarks made by the attendees during the class discussion, as well as the underlying reasons for their actions (Kumaravadivelu, 1999). Second, even though they might be geographically apart, this study identifies the interaction mechanism that lets individuals be concurrently involved in social activity and temporally co-present.

Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was employed to examine how positioning, power, and resistance shape English language learners' identity construction in classroom discourse.

This methodology enables a comprehensive investigation of the sociocultural factors that influence learner identities.

We employed a qualitative observation-based research design to gain in-depth insight into English language learners' positionality, resistance, and identity. This approach provided contextual insights into learners' behaviours, participation patterns, and responses to classroom power relations. We utilized naturalistic observation (Angrosino, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2017) to collect data from the participants, where individuals interacted without intervention (Angrosino, 2016). The study used an observation technique with a limited number of instructors and students during class interactions (Kumaravadivelu, 1999), employing purposive sampling to select a specific class.

Participants

One of the constraints of the study was prioritizing conversation and speaking exercises. Given these parameters, we selected a speaking course that is one of the optional components of higher-education minors at a public campus in Nepal and features an English-language component. The participants belonged to the same culture and shared the same language, using English and Nepali, with Nepali as their mother tongue. The students were selected from those who study English at a higher education institution (17 students: 10 women and 7 men). The study also used classroom exchanges, observations, and semi-structured focus groups with students and English language teachers in a specific educational context.

Data Collection

We undertook classroom observations followed by semi-structured interviews with teachers and students. We obtained the participants' views and experiences through interviews. The interviews had guiding questions but followed an emergent design. We allowed the participants to discuss how they experienced power in their classroom interactions and negotiated their identities by asking open-ended questions. This approach was appropriate for exploring participants' lived experiences and classroom interactions through multiple qualitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 1998). This provided detailed information from participants, and we made notes and audio-video recordings during observations. We captured nonverbal actions and verbal utterances through classroom observations. The observations helped us understand students' and instructors' interactions and how the former negotiated their identities and power.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the collected data within the theoretical framework of Critical Classroom Discourse Analysis to understand how power was deployed and how teachers and students positioned themselves in the classroom. CCDA builds on Kumaravadivelu's ideas about classroom power and position. We made verbatim transcripts of the audio-video recordings captured during observations to take account of code-switching and verbal hesitations. We then conducted open coding of the transcripts to discover patterns in responses and actions. We identified instances in the transcripts where participants invoked responsive stances, such as asserting their instructors' dominance, resisting by words or deeds, or negotiating between their positions. The initial codes were categorized into three groups: (a) passive resistance through code selection, (b) power dynamics in interactions, and (c) diverse classroom contexts, as indicated by Dumlao and Tian (2020). We employed Fairclough's three-dimensional critical discourse analysis to discuss the results. We explored the results through three aspects of critical discourse analysis: discourse as a resource for linguistic and code-switching practices; discourse as a practice of creating and regulating discourses by specific groups; and discourse as social interaction in English within the realm of Nepali education. The study applied

recursive coding for discussion and verification to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. The findings contribute to a better understanding of how English language students negotiated, constructed, and resisted their identities in an English-dominant context. Ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring that participants provided informed consent.

Findings and Discussion

Three themes emerged after considering the information provided by the participants and my observations: student positioning and resistance; power and identity construction; and multiple positioning and its effect on self-image.

Student Positioning and Resistance

Students' postures and resistances in educational contexts originate from multiple sources, including social, institutional, and interventionist factors, as well as their interaction with students' agency. Empirical findings highlight that students display a range of agency profiles that influence their educational contexts in different ways (Winkler & Rybnikova, 2024). The discourse of what is expected from students in terms of conduct and image in the classroom setting allows for a broad spectrum of identity positions. But we also observe a narrow, privileged language that helps learners define resistance.

Students respond to the problem by taking defensive postures or, alternatively, by confronting the problem. Learners' choice of responses indicates that their peer groups and teachers have a great influence on their willingness to face challenges and improve their learning (Gidycz & Dardis, 2014). The relationship between personal responsibility and external factors is significant, and it is essential to create conditions that allow learners to take responsibility for their academic performance to address the problem. Furthermore, the identification and social circumstances are closely associated with the notion of resistance, which binds these experiences together.

The data analysis indicates that English language students are hesitant to respond to teachers' inquiries. As the data presented below shows, learners made an effort to use language to express their views during the conversation. They often switched between Nepali and English. This implies that they might not have been able to form proper sentences in either language on their own. This observation coincides with Wiriyachitra's (2002) finding that they were hesitant to use English to communicate with their peers and remain passive learners. In the first extract, for instance, they were reluctant to communicate during the class discussion.

> Teacher: *Students, I am going to ask an important question about your interest in learning English today. So, can you tell me why you are interested in pursuing a Major in English for your higher studies?*
>
> Student 1: (Pause) *Actually, I don't know why I chose a Major in English to study. (Pause) (K bhanau k khai) What to say or not to say? (pause) But one of my friends suggested that it would be better to study abroad if we studied English.*
>
> Student 2: *Sir, mine is different. I want to be a teacher like you.*
>
> Student 3: *(haina sir yesale dhatyo, bides janchhu bhanya hoenas) (Pause) No, sir, he is telling a lie. Previously (addressing his friend), haven't you told me to go abroad?*
>
> Student 4: *Sir, I want to score considerable marks in IELTS so that I can go abroad.*
>
> Student 5: *Sir, I want to speak English fluently just like you.*

The discussion suggests that some students want to learn to communicate from Nepali to English, while others want to communicate from English to Nepali. This allows learners to

move beyond just identifying that Nepali is not English and create meaning that teachers can understand. Theoretically, this is an example of translanguaging, through which learners make use of their whole linguistic repertoire to communicate, engage, and identify as bilingual or emerging English speakers (Mateus, 2014). It may, however, place learners with limited English skills at a disadvantage, positioning them as less capable members of the classroom and impacting their ability to develop their identity in the English language setting.

Based on the above sharing of classroom experiences, the findings reveal that the students wanted to continue the dialogues by mixing languages, especially by switching in the middle of words. However, it's evident that "silencing" occurs every time a student transitions from English to Nepali, and vice versa. Silence in this context could be understood as a stage of thinking or processing. Nonetheless, a few students use code-switching to mark their messages for emphasis and clarity. Consequently, the pattern reflects how they constructed their learner identities as students engaging with teachers and negotiating meaning (Early & Norton, 2012; Skinnari, 2014), becoming students with a growth mindset (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). Furthermore, this kind of resistance deserves attention, as resistance is not only a reaction to oppression (Brooks, 2016). Multiple strategies of resistance require disentangling one from another, going beyond a simplistic analysis that frames code-switching practices as merely an oppressive response. Additionally, beyond the push and pull of students' specific conduct, there is the contribution of broader institutional and social factors. The following exchange occurred during the initial round of teacher–student communication, when the teacher invited students to explain their reasons for choosing Major English.

> Teacher: *Good morning, everyone. I would like to discuss why you chose to study English. Could you explain?*
> Student A: (pauses) *To be honest, I'm not entirely sure. (K bhannu Khai means what to say) My kins and kiths encouraged me to believe that knowing English might open doors all across the world, so I thought it might be a good path. (Padhane Batabaranai Chhhaina…. Laughs). There is no environment for studying.*
> *Student B: Sir, mine is different. I want to teach English and inspire others the way you have inspired us.*
> Teacher: *However, you did say last week that you liked working in international business, right?* Student C: (quietly chuckles).
>
> Student D: *For me, it's for the opportunities. I always dream of studying abroad, and if I score well in the IELTS, I can achieve my dream.*

Student A's uncertainty and reliance on a relative's advice illustrate a passive stance, which implies little agency in educational decisions. The use of the native language phrase *"(K bhannu Khai)"* (what to say) and the comment *"(Padhane Batabaranai Chhhaina…)"* (there is no environment of studying) imply a sense of alienation or lack of support in the learning environment. In contrast, Student B is portrayed as a potential educator who fits the job description and has a clear professional goal. Student D offers a useful motivation, as she regards fluency in English as a means of achieving her goal of studying abroad.

Student A's use of native language idioms and his/her recognition of unsupportive educational environments as signs of passive resistance. Student C's challenge to Student B's proposition is evidence of resistance to the reliability of peer identities, which represents an active form of resistance. The above instances demonstrate how identity becomes fluid in English language contexts, with students using language, participating in particular ways during lessons, and interacting with their teachers to negotiate who they are (Dumlao & Tian, 2020). Therefore, using positioning theory, we can see the classroom as a microcosm of society. Students will adopt, reject, or re-adopt positions based on linguistic, cultural, and

institutional relations (Davies & Harré, 1990). As such, student identities are enacted, challenged, and negotiated within the classroom discourse.

Power Dynamics in Classroom Dialogic Discourse

Power relations are critical elements embedded in social, cultural, and political processes related to identity construction. Critical Discourse Analysis focuses on investigating the power relations of institutions, languages, and media. In particular, identity construction in classroom dialogic discourse emerges from power relations and is attributed to the equal power distribution between a lecturer and students (Syahriani et al., 2024). The discursive construction of learner identity fosters critical reflection, as students engage with dialogic discourse that is hospitable to multiple points of view. Though identity formation and expression are functions of power and can be understood in a school environment where various social groups (students, teachers, peers, etc.) construct student identity differently and shape the possibilities for their participation, recognition, and legitimacy as learners in particular ways.

Student Voice vs. Teacher Authority

The teacher negotiates by questioning, seeking information from students, requesting permission to respond to or add to students' questions, providing opportunities for students to ask questions when the material is unclear, and offering them the chance to express their opinions. Meanwhile, they also interact with the teacher, using facial expressions during discussions and asking for more time to answer questions. They also ask for feedback from the teacher on their comments. In this scenario, the teacher has control over the participants. This means that they have control over the discussion and can approve answers given. However, encouraging individuals to hold diverse opinions can enable them to be more expressive (Syahriani et al., 2024). Moreover, if the person in charge dominates the conversation, it deters students from sharing their thoughts. For example, if an individual offers an alternative way of speaking in the discussion, the teacher can dominate the discussion and enforce their own views.

> Teacher: Ok, then, how much did you learn to speak?
>
> Student 1: *Soche jhai hudo rainchha sar.* (Things are not going as usual, sir) (pause) *bolnai laaj lagchha.* (I feel too shy to speak) Speaking is difficult, so you need to concentrate only in English.
>
> Student 2: I found it easy in grammar in use, but not in practice. *Bolani llaaj lagchha, sathiharu ni boldainan, bole bigrinchha jasto lagchha.* (I feel shy to speak English, friends also do not speak in English, and I am in fear of making mistakes while speaking.)
>
> Teacher 1: Practice makes a person perfect. If you don't speak, then how can you learn it? Try as usual: don't think about grammar and tense; just focus on making it make sense. Then you would be familiar with the language.
>
> Student 3: While we listen to you, we feel we can do it, but in reality, it is really difficult.
>
> Student 4: I think …..umm, grammar learning is funny, but when we read the literary text, it seems hard.

This conversation shows power relations within the class between the teacher and student. The teacher uses this dialogue to increase fluency by encouraging English speech. They also seem quite accepting to any mistakes made. However, many students appear to be

nervous about making mistakes, which can reduce their confidence and participation (Horwitz et al., 1986). Students 1 and 2 discuss the social barriers they face, both feeling embarrassed about speaking English. This suggests their participation is influenced by their identity, security, and linguistic capital (Norton, 2013). Student 3 expresses excitement at being able to overcome self-effacement, whilst also acknowledging how difficult it can be, and student 4 shows hesitancy. This again suggests unequal relationships between teacher and pupil. Dialogue is used within classrooms to create and negotiate power relations (Fairclough, 2013). This conversation highlights the learners' concerns about learning English and shows how the teacher is trying to encourage greater fluency.

Influence from Peers and Social Positioning

Students interact with each other to negotiate their identities. Some students take passive roles in interactions with others because they are afraid of being judged. Others take dominant roles in classroom interactions. For example, a confident student interrupts shy students when discussing something in class, thereby promoting the dominant students' views and suppressing the passive students.

> Student 5: Sometimes we feel bored *(bujhanai sakinna, k bhannu hunchha k)* (we can't understand what you are saying), but we listen.
>
> Teacher: Why didn't you tell me previously, if so?
>
> Student 6: *Bhanai sakinna sir* (We can't say, sir).
>
> Student 7: (Interrupting) *Bujhana ta bujhinchha hai* sir (We can understand, sir). But we have a speaking problem.
>
> Student 8: Yes, sir, we can understand. *Yele tesai bhanchha k* (He is telling a lie)
>
> Student 9: *Mero matalab to hoena k?* (I don't mean so). *Speaking problem bhaneko.* (I mean speaking problem)

This example illustrates how students' social pressures, power relations, and social standing affect their participation. The teacher, acting as the powerful figure, asks the students why they have not discussed the problems they have been having before. This shows how anxiety during foreign language learning can reduce learners' willingness to participate in English language classes (Solhi, 2024). In an attempt to create a more equal relationship, Student 7 says that speaking is more important than just understanding. Student 8 accuses Student 6 of lying, which shows how peers' responses can affect learners' confidence and willingness to put forward their views. Peer influence and fear of negative judgment are seen as key external factors affecting English language learners' willingness to speak (Banunaek et al., 2026). Student 9 describes struggling to speak clearly due to their peers' reactions and social standing. Learners will adopt and negotiate roles during classroom interactions (Octavianah & Putra, 2023). Overall, this example shows how the students manage their identities by considering their peer relationships, power relations, and personal anxieties.

Hegemony in Language and Culture

The impact of English on non-native English-speaking nations is dominant in the fields of economics, governance, and science in our rapidly globalizing world. With its symbolic importance and unassailable position as the global lingua franca, English is not only a crucial tool for international communication in today's interconnected environment but also the most widely spoken foreign language in many countries (Zeng & Yang, 2024). There has been an influence on the political economies and linguistic policies of various countries due to the dominance of English. Students from a Nepali context are reluctant to share their ideas.

However, the influential areas feel empowered. During classroom debates, students often express opinions that support the current situation.

> Teacher: Do you think that every Nepali student should learn English?
>
> Student 1: Yes, sir!
>
> Student 2: Why not, sir? *Mobile Game khelda ta English chhahinchha*. (We need English even to play games on cell phones, too.)
>
> Student 3: To know even the operating system of mobile phones, sir.
>
> Student 4: English is just like our blood, sir. Everywhere it is needed. (adds a narrative) *Ma gau gako, yeuta gore aako raichha Sahila baa le ooya kanchha yo gore le k bolyachha bhana ta hami ta kehi bujenau. Ta ta English padhera aako aauchha hola ni ta, bhane, kya billa bho yar, ma ta sochanai sakdina!* (Once, while I was in my village, there was a tourist. My elder father told me to translate what he had said because they could not understand his language. What a shy moment there, I can't imagine!)

The discourse on hegemony, in the sense of establishing identities through linguistic and dialogic discourse relations, is further emphasized by classroom interaction, in which the teacher presents English as a skill necessary for Nepali students. Hence, this question is another tool to construct the hegemony of English in the classroom. The students are enthusiastic about this question, indicating how vital it is to understand English. This is because English plays a vital role in our lives and in the digital world, including mobile games and operating systems. However, Phyak and Khanal (2025) mention that 'the English wing has been introduced to meet the needs of *shikshit* (educated) parents.' Moreover, student 4 discusses the pressure to perform in English as a marker of excellence, because being unintelligible in this subject makes one appear less intelligent. The situation in the village, where he could not translate for the foreigner, shows that the language is imposed on people as superior, because knowledge of it brings esteem and pride. This perspective illustrates the power dynamic between languages that places some above others, subconsciously manipulating learners into believing that their native dialects are not above others and are undesirable. Milligan (2022) criticizes the removal of pupils' mother tongues, claiming it causes epistemic unfairness for learners. This term refers to the wrong being committed against an individual in their capacity as a knowledge producer.

> Teacher: Good morning, students. Today, I want to discuss the value of learning English. Do you mind expressing your thoughts?
> Student A: That's right, sir. It is *siknu zaruri chha* (compulsory to learn) since English is used in workplaces, classrooms, and even mobile applications. *Hami lai duniya sanga connect garna madat garcha, sir mero bichar ma.* (Sir, I think it helps to connect with the outer world.
>
> Student B. If we don't speak English, we are alone.
> Student C: The last time I went to Kathmandu, I had to ask for directions. *Ani usle English ma nai jawab diyo* (And he answered me in English). *tyaspachi maile bujhe, kasto upyogi chha* (Only then I realized how important it is).
> Student C: *Ma padhne, mero sapana chha abroad*, sir (I study, my plan is to study abroad). But English scores are good, while IELTS scores are poor.

The classroom dialogue shows how the hegemonic nature of the English language shapes debates about its use in Nepal. Students see English as a means to interact with people all over the world, travel, and pursue future opportunities. They see it as a valued resource for educational, employment, and social benefits (Sah & Caprario, 2026). When referring to

traveling and working abroad, English is viewed as a prerequisite for economic success and for being part of a global community (Alali & Alruwaili, 2024). The students feel proud to speak English; therefore, it holds symbolic meaning for them. They are using English to identify themselves as educated, capable, and modern (Sharma, 2025). As the students have put effort into learning English, they will be affected by their perceived identity, the resources available to them, and the ideologies surrounding English. This means that their connection with English is predicated on attaining prestige and economic success, and because of its hegemonic nature, English has value in Nepali culture.

While the English language has been a critical part of the developing Nepal's education system, its adoption as the default medium of instruction has created several challenges. It has resulted in students being alienated from their native languages, which has adversely affected language preservation. In addition, classroom interactions show that the school system's tendency to favor English as the language of instruction has created negative attitudes towards local languages, contributing to confusion and misunderstanding. For example, students develop a negative attitude towards their mother tongue because they see their native language as primitive and English as sophisticated. The use of English as an umbrella language has developed negative attitudes towards students' native language. However, it is important to understand the significance of English whilst also recognizing the importance of protecting their linguistic heritage, so they are not overwhelmed by the superior status and economic value of the dominant language.

Conclusion

This study explores how positionality, power, resistance, and English hegemony influenced English language learners' identity development during dialogic classroom interactions in Nepal. It was found that English language learners have fluid identities that they negotiate during their interactions with the teacher and peers. Their identity is negotiated through strategies such as hesitations, strategic code-switching, challenging peers, and self-positioning to contest the institutional power the teacher holds by controlling the language.

Code-switching was used as a resource, but it also showed that learners lacked confidence in using English. English was viewed as highly prestigious due to its association with education, upward mobility, and economic opportunities. However, selective code-switching was used as a form of passive resistance to challenge the dominance of the English language. This allowed students to express their alternative linguistic identities.

This shows that English language classrooms are dialogic and inclusive spaces for students with multilingual and multifaceted identities. Teachers and policymakers must therefore encourage critical language awareness and tolerate translanguaging to help students feel more confident when participating, as they will be able to negotiate meaning and create more fluid and empowered identities as English learners.

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AI Declaration

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in a limited capacity to assist with language refinement, grammatical corrections, and improvement of the clarity and organization of the manuscript. The AI tools (OpenAI) use was limited to language-related suggestions and editorial support; the content, analysis, interpretation of data, and research findings were reviewed and verified by the authors, who retain full responsibility for the manuscript. Human oversight was maintained throughout the process.

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