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## Interviewing Female Teachers as a Male Researcher: A Field Reflection from a Patriarchal Society Perspective

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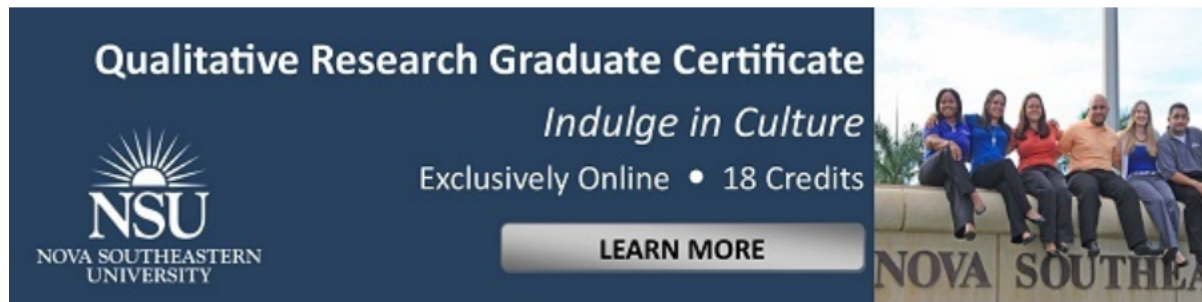
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### Abstract

This article examines the role of gender difference in a qualitative interview from the theoretical lenses of the sociocultural perspective of teachers' identity in a localized context of Ph.D. field research. The study blends the researcher's critical reflections during interviewing female teachers in exploring their teacher identity and existing literature on gender differences in a qualitative interview. In addition, a research diary is used as the data source to unpack the complexity of gender dynamics in a qualitative interview. To add to the discussion of gender difference in a qualitative interview, we argued that gender difference between the interviewer and the interviewee mediates and shapes the data collection in a qualitative interview. Thus, to understand the role of gender difference in a qualitative interview, it is necessary to do a comprehensive analysis of the complex dynamics of gender matching, the cultural background of the interviewee, and possible power relations between the researcher and participants. This study contributes to the dynamics in interviewing women by a man outside the Western cultural setting, particularly during a field research experience by a Ph.D. scholar.

### Keywords

qualitative interview, gender difference, sociocultural context, rapport building, narrative inquiry, field notes

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# **Interviewing Female Teachers as a Male Researcher: A Field Reflection from a Patriarchal Society Perspective**

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This article examines the role of gender difference in a qualitative interview from the theoretical lenses of the sociocultural perspective of teachers' identity in a localized context of Ph.D. field research. The study blends the researcher's critical reflections during interviewing female teachers in exploring their teacher identity and existing literature on gender differences in a qualitative interview. In addition, a research diary is used as the data source to unpack the complexity of gender dynamics in a qualitative interview. To add to the discussion of gender difference in a qualitative interview, we argued that gender difference between the interviewer and the interviewee mediates and shapes the data collection in a qualitative interview. Thus, to understand the role of gender difference in a qualitative interview, it is necessary to do a comprehensive analysis of the complex dynamics of gender matching, the cultural background of the interviewee, and possible power relations between the researcher and participants. This study contributes to the dynamics in interviewing women by a man outside the Western cultural setting, particularly during a field research experience by a Ph.D. scholar.

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## **Introduction**

As interview becomes a more and more widely used data collection method due to the need to understand the study phenomena in a more nuanced way, the gender identity of the interviewer and interviewee becomes a phenomenon. In a male dominated society with a deep-rooted patriarchal culture, what is the nature of complexity when a male interviews a female participant? We explored the reflection on the role of gender difference in a qualitative interview from the theoretical lenses of the sociocultural perspectives of teachers' identity in a localized context of a Ph.D. field research. Interview is one of the most widely used data collection methods in qualitative research, particularly in social sciences. Qualitative interviews offer in-depth information on the study phenomenon of "attitudes, values, understandings, views, experiences, and opinions" (Byrne, 2018, p. 469). Qualitative interviews largely use open-ended questions to explore in-depth information and uncover the study phenomena. However, various identity markers such as age, gender, race, and ethnicity sometimes become barriers in accessing the in-depth information from the participants in a naturalistic way. Similarly, as Lefkowich (2019) argues, these identity markers diminish the research findings. However, traditional interviewers often ignore the role of gender and other affecting factors (Seidman, 2006).

As an interviewer, the first author of this article is currently engaged in carrying out his Ph.D. study to explore the teacher identity of elementary level teachers from the public schools

in Nepal. An in-depth interview is the primary method of data collection for the deeper understanding of the study phenomena. The interviewer sensed that female participants were generally more sensitive and hesitant to disclose information than male participants in the field. Even though the initial hunch was that the problem was due to inadequate rapport building, but after a series of interviews a pattern emerged which indicated that the problem might be associated with the social complexities associated with gender. Studies carried out by scholars such as Solari and Martín Ortega (2020), Vågan (2011), and Byrne (2018) concluded that sociocultural contexts are influential in a qualitative interview. Additionally, Fontana and Frey (2005) highlighted the role of gender in a qualitative interview. Realizing the gender difference in qualitative data collection, we explore the role of gender in an interview during qualitative research.

### **Literature Review**

Only a few studies discuss the role of gender in the data collection process using qualitative interviews. Most of these studies have focused on interviewing male participants by a female researcher (Gailey & Prohaska, 2011; Herod, 1993; Manderson et al., 2006; Oakley, 2016; Riessman, 1987). Very few studies discuss interviewing females by a male researcher. Not surprisingly, extant literature is minuscule on the role of gender in collecting the qualitative data, searching particularly on Google Scholar and, ERIC, and non-existent in Nepal Journals Online (NepJOL). However, some researchers, such as Byrne (2018), Edwards and Holland (2013), Holstein and Gubrium (2003), and Gillham, (2005), discuss the gender role in a qualitative interview. We were particularly interested in finding research about the Ph.D. scholars' field experiences in qualitative interviews with females by males, which we found was not discussed very well. Hence, we took on this study hoping to fill the knowledge gap on the gender difference in qualitative interviewing.

The qualitative interviews, which could be formal or informal, sought the data in-depth to explore the participants' rich information on the study phenomenon. Compared to formal interviews, informal discussions can be useful in collecting rich and detailed information since the informality creates equity between the researcher and the participant (Kosygina, 2005). The cultural contexts of the participants, such as beliefs, experiences, perceptions, and views, impact their understanding and meaning making towards specific events or situations that influence the interview. As a result, a researcher needs to pay more attention to the existing sociocultural context of the participants' surroundings interviewing with the participants. Without understanding the local society, the interviewer could not obtain accurate data. Moreover, knowledge of the local language enhances the researcher's ability to conduct a successful interview. Fontana and Frey (2005) also stressed the role of "understanding the language and culture" (p. 707) of the participants for gathering in-depth information. Such an interview intends to explore the experiences and opinions of the participants in detail from their perspectives. The richness and depth of information depend on the interviewer's skills (Rapley, 2001) to elicit the data. This notion of artfulness highlights building relations with the participants to gain their trust.

### **Gender Difference in Qualitative Interview**

Exploring the qualitative data through the interview is an act of capturing the research participants' experiences, feelings, and opinions. Researchers can get "a richer account of events" (Herod, 1993, p. 305) from the open-ended qualitative interview, which is impossible through the structured/close-ended interview. The participants tell their stories as narratives during the interview when the interviewer employs listening to their stories (Riessman, 1987;

Roberts, 2020). The general assumption is that participants engage in interviews regardless of their gender by unfolding the stories in-depth. However, various researchers have discussed the role of gender, which may play out differently and may often pose a challenge in eliciting in-depth information from the research participants.

While gender is a component of culture, in the existing sociocultural contexts it influences the data collection (Vågan, 2011). Explaining how the gender of the interviewer and the interviewee make a difference in existing "cultural boundaries," Fontana and Frey (2005) argue that "interviews take place with the cultural boundaries of a paternalistic social system in which masculine identities are differentiated from feminine ones" (p. 710).

The relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, that is, the "social relationship" (Herod, 1993), impacts the interviewing process in gathering the participants' real stories. For instance, it can be argued that female researchers could capture the female participant's emotional states, which may not be easier for the male interviewer. Gender congruence can be helpful in many situations due to existing relationships constructed by the cultural and hierarchical positions. According to Oakley (2016), friendship can also help gain information while collecting data by using interview. In addition, she emphasizes understanding the complex social relationships that "the complexity of the interview process, especially concerning the dynamics of power and social divisions between women" (Oakley, 2016, p. 197). However, as Byrne (2018) indicates, friendship cannot always be supportive in gathering information. Same sex between the interviewer and interview can help understand each other and create a conducive environment for taking the interview. While some researchers, such as Williams and Heikes (1993), have found the opposite sex to be more problematic for the frank disclosure. They have also noted that sometimes interviewing men by a woman is preferable since "men are more comfortable talking about the intimate topic with women than with other men" (Williams & Heikes, 1993, p. 281). However, in her field experience, Pini (2005) had a different experience that "men emphasizing their heterosexuality, presenting themselves as powerful and busy. Likewise, Kosygina (2005) argued that "mutual gender categorization of interacting people and construction of their behavior according to this categorization" (p. 87). In addition, Kosygina (2005) concluded that the gender difference between the researcher and the participants influences the research process and method.

Gender is one of the critical components of qualitative interviewing that "filters knowledge" (Denzin, 1989, as cited in Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 710). Filtering knowledge could prevent collecting the rich and in-depth information that is aspired from the participants. As a result, the naturalness of the data could be lost and the interview turns into a pseudo interview. The gender difference could lead to the filtering of the interview, which may render an interview to a mere ritual. The different roles, social codes, and behaviors in the field or the interview sites could contribute to conducive or non-conducive conversations between the interviewer and the interviewee. For females to speak with a male outside the family member is considered sensitive in the existing cultural context of Nepali society. A researcher needs to pay careful attention to smooth conversations while interviewing participants of different gender, such as female participants by a male researcher. For instance, Gailey and Prohaska (2011) experienced unusual behaviors from their participant during the interview. They further reported that as female researchers they became surprised when one of their male participants diverted the interview to unnecessary personal matters of the female interviewers, particularly related to sexual harassment. However, familiarity and relationship between the participant and researcher is another influencing factor for naturally gathering the data. Existing studies (Oakley, 2016; Thwaites, 2017) suggest the influence of gender differences in maintaining the relationship between the researcher and participants, which in turn affects data collection using interviews. For example, matching the gender during the interview is likely to promote open discussion, increasing the chances of getting in-depth information, but instead, people do not

speak frankly when the gender is different Thwaites (2017). Likewise, in her doctoral research interview with a man Pini (2005) experienced hostile behavior in the man's interview showing he was powerful and had superior knowledge. She made important observations about “‘who is asking whom about what and where?’ Gender is, of course, never absent from a site, but some areas may be more overtly and strongly gendered than others” and that “in such a space, a woman asking men about gender relations is likely to meet with a high degree of resistance” (Pini, 2005, p. 212).

Growing numbers of researchers discuss gender differences in qualitative research. Researchers need to be more sensitive toward the gender identity of the participants particularly during the interview. As a result, a harmonious relationship is built between the researcher and the participant for conducting the interview. However, during their qualitative interview, many researchers forget the participants' identity and social identity and “try to ignore such forces” (Seidman, 2006, p. 94), potentially leaving important aspects of the interview.

### **Methodology**

This paper reflects the first author's field experience as a male Ph.D. researcher in interviewing female primary school teachers (the elementary level is called the primary level in Nepal) in his Ph.D. preliminary study. Reflection of the first author is documented as a recursive process and can be used as a tool and a data source in qualitative research (Chenail, 2011; Kosygina, 2005). In this study, we understand reflection as a combination of purposeful feelings, thoughts, actions, and insights when interviewing participants (Deggs & Hernandez, 2018). This reflection is part of a larger Ph.D. study of the first author on the teacher identity of primary teachers, where he also interviewed male teachers, but this reflection focuses only on the experience of interviewing female teachers and hence excludes the male participants. This study utilized the narrative inquiry as a research design that focuses on capturing the primary teachers' stories as “the study of experience as story” (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 22). We used three methods such as interviews, field notes, and researcher reflections for the study. The first author collected data between July 2021 and December 2021. The three female primary teachers were included in this study. The participants were selected by using a purposive sampling method. The three female participants, having permanent positions, were primary level teachers teaching at the Basic Levels of three different community (government) schools in Kaski district, Nepal. All of them have at least ten years of teaching experience. Pseudonyms replace the actual name of the participants as Ranjana, Meera, and Sarita.

This paper attempts to situate the field experience in the existing literature in qualitative interviewing, as was previously focused by Nicholl (2010). As suggested by Snyder (2019), we have synthesized literature to explore the phenomenon, providing a lens to understand the problem. Besides, a reflection of the research diary of the interviewer containing all the events of the field as a data source has been revealed (Edwards & Holland, 2013; Nicholl, 2010; Wall et al., 2004). The field visit diary (i.e., a reflexive journal) elaborated based on the field notes consists of details of events, context, interviewee body language, expressions, etc., that were observed during the interview. In addition, the first author wrote his intuitions, feelings, perceptions, and observations of what he experienced during the interview. Qualitative research allows subjective epistemology since the knowledge is gained through the stories and experiences of the participants. In addition to the participants' experiences, the data collected from the field notes allowed us to conceptualize the phenomenon. For instance, Deggs and Hernandez (2018) state that field notes offer data sources and help researchers with their critical reflection. The detailed accounts of the interviewer's events from the field notes allowed us often to find ourselves as an instrument of data collection, if not data itself. As Mulholland (2007) discussed, the interviewer's reflection and field notes, and interview are used as a

qualitative data collection instrument in this study. Researchers in qualitative research cannot be isolated from the research procedure (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). We find these observations intriguing and hope that further exploration of these dynamics may have important insights for field research.

Before conducting the interviews, the first author engaged in informal conversations with the participants. In addition to these conversations, three formal interviews were conducted. The process of building rapport with the participants is described in the first theme. Sarita was interviewed in her home, in the presence of her husband, while Ranjana and Meera were interviewed at their school premises. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to one hour, and the first author obtained written informed consent from the participants before beginning the interview. Details of the interview process are described in the first and second themes. The first author encountered a notable challenge in gaining access to female participants due to the sensitive cultural practices of patriarchal Nepali society. In order to conduct the research and collect data, the first author had to meet with the husband of the participants and gain their approval for the interview. Once the husbands provided oral consent for the interview, the first author was able to take interview with the wives. Without convincing the husbands, it would not have been possible to interview the participants. In general, the approval of the husbands of our participants was not a requirement. Still, it was necessary to obtain their consent due to the possibility of suspicion and potential problems that could arise from interviewing females without their husband's approval. The interviews were conducted in Nepali and recorded using the audio voice recorder. The first interview was introductory, and the ways to begin the conversation with the participants. The sample questions included: Could you tell me a little bit about your entry into teaching? What motivated you to join teaching? Could you tell me about your early days of teaching? How did you feel in the beginning days of your teaching career? However, the second and third interviews were focused on the different aspects and tensions of teacher identity. The sample questions included: Tell me the joys and tensions you might have experienced in teaching. Could you share how you feel and define yourself as a primary teacher? Please share your stories of your struggle, mediation, and negotiation and their influence on your identities. Would you share your feelings about hierarchy and job status as a primary teacher?

After completing the interview, the first author transcribed data in the same Nepali language and translated them into English. We employed narrative thematic analysis in order to analyze the data that focuses on “what is said” (Riessman, 2008; Smith & Sparkes, 2012) in the participants’ stories. To make sense of the data collected from the interview, both authors read the translated data multiple times and sensed them as per the research question. After reading the translation of the transcription, we coded, translated and categorized the data (Saldaña, 2021). For the analysis, used Using the Google Doc platform, we thoroughly checked and rechecked the codes, categories, and themes. More importantly, the first author assured the participants of anonymity and confidentiality of the data received from them.

To maintain the research ethics and the study's trustworthiness, we obtained the written informed consent from the participants. Moreover, the member checking was completed with the participants by providing them with the transcription.

## **Findings and Discussion**

Three themes emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts and field notes: (a) Dynamics of interviewing women, (b) cultural influence, and (c) power relations.

### **Dynamics of Interviewing Women**

As a narrative inquiry on teacher identity is the interviewer's doctoral journey and his familiarization in working with their stories of experiences, this study explores participants' stories in detail to "translate knowing into telling" (Riessman, 1987, p. 172). Before starting the interview, the researcher did several rapport-building activities with the participants described below. Building rapport is the first essential task before the interview; otherwise, it would be difficult to obtain the "accurate and honest data" (Santovec, 2014, p. 17). For instance, Thwaites (2017) argues that building rapport is key to getting the required data determining success and failure in a qualitative interview. The interviewer visited at least three times with the female teachers at their homes or schools and discussed the ongoing Ph.D. research and their participation in this study for the required data.

Additionally, the interviewer requested the participants to sign the informed consent form with detailed explanations about the ethical issues of interviewing. Then he explained to the participants that there is no right or wrong answer to the questions, but instead, they were free to respond. The interviewer assured them of their confidentiality in the research, hoping they would be comfortable sharing their stories without fear. Moreover, the interviewer assured that there is no possibility of harm from the study; instead, the research findings could improve the primary teachers' professional development activities. During building rapport with the participants, the interviewer met and made detailed conversations with the three participants' husbands and got their verbal consent to their wife's participation in the study. For instance, he tried to be informal in presenting himself to the participants, as suggested by (Kosygina, 2005). The husbands took an interest in the study and asked questions about the research purpose, procedures, and anonymity of their wife's participation during these conversations.

Furthermore, they asked the interviewer about the benefits of participating in the interview. It is noteworthy that all the husbands of female participants were secondary level teachers having a graduate degree in education. Two of them were retired secondary school teachers, and the remaining one was working as a secondary level teacher. We must mention that the time of the interview happened to be in the middle of the pandemic. It was July 2021, a peak period of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal. Schools were closed, and no in-person teaching-learning activities were taking place.

Firstly, the interviewer introduced himself in detail and then explained the purpose of his Ph.D. research in detail. To relate with the participants as an insider, the researcher introduced himself as a former elementary teacher pursuing a Ph.D. as a university teacher. Then the interviewer also assured participants of their confidentiality. We provided this disclosure to gain trust from the participants, believing that they would share their stories honestly and openly without hiding. The approach followed for the interview was not like a "question-answer format" (Kosygina, 2005) in which a researcher asks questions, and the participant answers. The interviewer framed the conversations as "in the moment experiences" (Turner, 2010, p. 755) instead of a pre-determined set of questions to obtain the data naturally. In addition, we used the narrative interview approach, as Clandinin (2013) suggested, for capturing the lived stories of participants' experiences. In this approach, the researcher creates a conducive environment for beginning the interview, and participants tell their stories without any hesitation. For this, research generally begins the interview with a simple elucidating question "that allows the research participant's story to unfold and then follow with probes for



additional insight into episodes and characters” (Roberts, 2020). Despite these rapport-building exercises, the researcher still felt that the participants were not readily sharing their stories. It appeared as if they were probably hiding something.

Other factors could be associated with the researchers in obtaining the information smoothly, such as interviewer skills, health and other conditions of the participants, “power relations between the interviewer and interviewee” (Anyan, 2013), “lack of supporting questions” (Roberts, 2020) and so on. During the interview with the female teachers, the interviewer paid careful attention to these factors that could influence the interview. Additionally, the interviewer had also been aware of the three mistakes the interviewer generally makes “losing track, steering, and lack of clarity” (Gesch-Karamanlidis, 2015). Similarly, qualitative researchers need to be more careful, such as the skills of asking the participants (Gesch-Karamanlidis, 2015; Roberts, 2020) so that they could be motivated and encouraged to share their experiences more freely. In the same vein, Chenail (2011) makes researchers aware that “researchers may remain blind to their biases, may be unable to anticipate problems with the study’s instrumentation, and may have unforeseen difficulties in utilizing the questions effectively” (p. 260). While Ranjana, another participant, was telling the story about her struggle to become a teacher with a little bit of hesitation compared to Meera and Sarita. However, Ranjana tried her best to look frank and professional during the informal conversations. The excerpt below demonstrates that she also cracked some jokes during the interview:

You came here to collect data for your Ph.D. at this age when your children might have been studying in college. I value your effort to study (छोरा छोरी पढ्ने बेलामा तपाईं आफै पढ्न लाग्नुभयछ, राम्रो). Furthermore, I am happy to share experiences and stories of my teaching career. I never got a chance to share my happiness and challenges as a teacher. (Field notes July 30, 2021)

The lighthearted statement of Ranjana made both the interviewer and interviewee feel at home and at ease. Before the interview with Ranjana, the interviewer had two informal meetings with her, sharing pleasantries and some information communication about family and life. It was noteworthy that a later informal meeting was held with her husband upon Ranjana’s request to participate in our meeting. Her husband was a recently retired secondary teacher with a graduate degree in sociology. The interviewer wondered why Ranjana’s husband asked so many questions about the Ph.D. research project, data collection procedure, interview duration, possible harm to his wife, and finally, the duration and times of the interview. Ranjana remained silent and listened to our conversations, yielding when her husband was speaking. Ranjana’s husband was not a research participant, generally, there was no need to talk to him. However, the interviewer had to convince her husband to get approval for the interview with Ranjana. Finally, the husband approved the interview. After initial informal meetings, the interviewer conducted two sessions of hour-long interviews with her. One interview was conducted at her school and the other at her home. During the home interview with Ranjana, her husband was also present and frequently checked in to ensure everything was well. He was doing his “husband’s duty” as a guardian, quite unaware of the possible interruptions. Most noteworthy was that he clarified and added Ranjana’s statements. “Sir,” he would look at me and say, “my wife missed sharing this point here.” He would then go on to explain what she meant to say. Ranjana never commented on what her husband said. It was probably the expected gender role of a good wife from her husband. No surprise, she remained silent, looked at us, and only listened to her husband’s conversations with the interviewer. It was frustrating for the interviewer that her husband would not let her speak freely. The husband was probably unaware that his explanations were not wanted. Finally, the interviewer had to change the

interview strategy. We hoped that the interviewee would be comfortable in her home, but we had to carry out the rest of the interview in the school, with her husband's permission, which would be necessary as a cultural protocol.

Learning from the experience, of interviewing Ranjana, we decided to conduct the rest of the interviews with other participants in the school. We obtained permission from the husbands prior to the interviews. It was not the case of a single participant; instead, a similar situation of husband's interference was evident during the interview with all three female participants. The interviewer imagined that the situation could have been different if the interviewer was a female (Thwaites, 2017) to get the desired information without hiding it from the participants.

The rapport building makes participants comfortable telling their stories efficiently (Broom et al., 2009; Lefkowich, 2019; Santovec, 2014; Thwaites, 2017). Researchers stress the importance of building rapport and mutual understanding in gaining the participants' confidence during the data collection. In addition, Byrne (2018) reminds us of the importance of gaining participants' confidence as "if you build up a good rapport with your interviewee, you may start to feel like a counselor" (p. 478). Keeping suggestions in mind from the literature, the interviewer has done informal meetings before the two rounds of in-depth interviews with the participants. Due to the gender difference between the interviewer and the interviewee, the interviewer was more cautious about presenting himself in a usual way to feel comfortable. For instance, the notion of Clandinin (2013) made us aware of being profoundly immersed in the stories of the participants that "to understand each individual's experience, one must understand the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives that shape, and are shaped by, the individual" (p. 33). Although the interviewer tried to be cautious and followed the participants' social, cultural, and familial contexts, he felt that the female participants were not sharing their stories since they hesitated to share their entry teaching careers entirely with the interviewer. Although we have not included male participants in this particular study, we previously have found male participants to have shared their stories of experiences frankly and comfortably compared to the female participants (Subedi, 2023). One reason behind it could be the "matching of gender" (Thwaites, 2017, p. 6) between the interviewer and interviewee with the male participants. Another reason was that the interviewer had no burden to convince the male teachers' wives. In Nepal's current existing system of the patriarchal societal context, "patriarchy has exploited females and excluded them from educational gain" (Dahal et al., 2021). The female teachers have been experiencing some kinds of exclusion in their profession (Paudyal, 2015) due to the gender difference.

Similarly, in other studies, Ong et al. (2021) reported that "patriarchy was an especially salient issue for participants" (p. 2) that is deep-rooted by tradition. When the interviewer encountered this gender interference for the first time, he thought it was probably due to the lack of adequate rapport-building with the participants. As the same problem occurred during the second interview, the researcher considered this a phenomenon of interest. It appeared that male and female interviewees' gender dynamics were intermediating the elicitation of stories and hindering the smooth sharing of experiences.

A few studies have discussed interviewing women by a man (Alsenberg et al., 2003; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Santovec, 2014). Several studies confirmed the gender difference during interviews, particularly in interviewing men by a woman (Gailey & Prohaska, 2011; Herod, 1993; Lefkowich, 2019; Oakley, 2016; Pini, 2005). Nevertheless, the problem remained the same with female participants. Additionally, studies highlight the behaviors and dress code during interviewing women by a man (Gailey & Prohaska, 2011; Santovec, 2014). The author further claims that "when a man interviews a woman, he needs to accommodate the women's schedule, and both must be comfortable with the meeting place. He must be aware of his tone and dress and notice nonverbal cues (Santovec, 2014, p. 17). Before beginning the interview.

The interviewer has initiated informal conversations about the participant's experience in the early days of teaching. He could not collect adequate data, although the interviewer tried to be honest in considering the suggestions from the above-discussed literature.

Moreover, the interviewer tried to obtain the information in a naturalistic environment of the participants' homes and schools with formal and simple dress-up, as Deggs and Hernandez (2018). As the interviewer makes a narrative inquiry, he must obtain rich narratives from the female participants to explore their teacher's identity. Narrative data are not simply the information obtained but rather contain the story and discourse of the participants. The interviewer tried to select the teacher in many attempts of informal conversations, as (Chenail & Chenail, 2009) reminds us. The story is the content of "what" is a narrative, and the discourse is the "how" the event occurred" (Sarup 1996, as cited in Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 717). These studies show a pattern that the problem is related to gender differences, although one of the participants shared her stories comfortably. In such a situation, female interviewers could have elucidated female participants' stories more efficiently, containing rich information. This finding is consistent with Williams and Heikes (1993), Broom et al. (2009), and (Byrne, 2018), who consider the researcher's gender during the interview. Some people are more likely to speak openly to others when matched with gender identity (Thwaites, 2017). However, matching gender may not produce the desired results consistently. For instance, Riessman (1987) experienced the negative role of gender matching in her study. For example, she further claims that "Marta's interview might have been smoother if conducted by a Puerto Rican man, but the gender nuances might have been missed" (Riessman, 1987, p. 191).

When interviewing Mira, the interviewer noticed her body language, facial expressions, and ease of responding to the interviewer's query. She did not feel comfortable, although the questions were easy and open-ended with clarity. After interviewing participants, the interviewer kept a daily reflexive journal and updated it in the same evening. Writing a daily field diary (i.e., reflexive journal) allowed the interviewer to understand participants' "complete records of words and action" (Nicholl, 2010, p. 16) as an alternative to interview data. Below is one excerpt of the researcher's field notes:

When I entered the office room, all the teachers stopped their conversations and focused on me. I went to the same school to meet Mira the second time I interviewed her. I had met her two times earlier. In the two informal meetings, I explained my study purpose, procedure, and expected data in our previous two informal meetings. We have agreed to sit for the interview for today's afternoon. They remained silent after I entered the office. After a while, I requested her for an interview, and we went to the library room. I gradually started to tell her about my query. Mira seemed confused about what to say. Although I mentioned earlier that I am not evaluating and judging her, she stopped speaking when describing a male headteacher's emotional issues and behaviors during her early teaching days. Her body language changed. Her smiley face turned serious, and her voice's pitch level changed. She paused our conversations for a while. I felt that she became emotional and uncomfortable. Then I stopped and immediately ended the interview that day. I diverted our conversation and ended the interview. (Field notes, July 20, 2021)

For instance, we were aware of the appearance of different expressions during the interview. There are gender differences in the occurrence of such emotional patterns as a study (Hellum & Oláh, 2019) in the Swedish context reported. As stated in the researcher's field notes, Mira could not easily express her stories since our conversations got diverted to the emotional matters of her early teaching years. That indicates that interviewing becomes

challenging while collecting the sensitive data related to the arousal of participants' emotional expressions.

### Cultural Influence

Research in the field cannot be isolated from the existing sociocultural context. Different context and behavioral patterns and the current cultural understanding affect interviews (Broom et al., 2009). Considering the culture affects teacher identity it is clear that the phenomenon of teacher identity is socially constructed. Nepal has been experiencing institutionalized patriarchal dominations for many years. One of the major causes of such domination is by religious traditions. For instance, it is argued that “women were also expected to adhere to propriety values; control their speech, defer personal gratification, and subordinate their desires in relation to their duties to husband and family” (Kaufman & Crawford, 2011, as cited in Ong et al., 2021, p. 12). Since the teachers in this study are from the same societal and cultural contexts, their roles have been understood by male-dominated thinking.

Moreover, researching the teacher identity of the Nepali female teachers has been influenced by a cultural influence of controlling power relations with the women. Solari and Martín Ortega (2020) view that “identity is intersubjective, emerges from discourses and is the product of teachers' participation in social practices” (p. 14). Realizing this kind of embedded cultural influence on the interview, the interviewer tried to be more cautious in respecting the cultural diversity of teachers and social patterns. Being from the same cultural context, the interviewer is familiar with cultural diversity. For instance, the interviewer contacted the female participants and went to meet them in their house. It was because meeting a female by a male outside home could be the issue. Likewise, at that time, the COVID-19 pandemic was at its peak, and schools remained closed during the time of the first interview with the participants. However, the interviewer has conducted the second interview in their respective schools. Instead of meeting them separately while interviewing at home the interviewer met the female participants and their husbands or family members due to cultural reasons. The interviewer thought that the family members would not be unnecessarily suspicious about the interview, like in a cultural context in most Nepali societies. Before getting consent from the female participants, the interviewer convinced their husbands and got verbal consent for their wife's involvement in the study. It is not a single case instead of all the three female participants. Related to this situation, the following field notes of the interviewer denote the husband's pressure over the female participant as:

I reached Mira's home at 8 A.M. It was the first informal meeting with her to request that she participate in my study and get her formal consent. When I reached her house, Mira was cleaning the house, and her husband was listening to the morning news sitting in the chair. I had already scheduled this meeting by calling Meera using her cell phone number, which was given to me by the headteacher. I had never met them in person before. We exchanged greetings. She stopped cleaning, entered the kitchen, prepared three cups of tea, and offered it to her husband and to me. We started having an informal conversation over tea. She told me that “my husband is curious about your research, so talk to him in detail about what I have to do” (*in the vernacular*: हाम्रो सरले तपाइको अनुसन्धानको बारेमा जान खोज्नुभायाकोछ, के हो कसो हो, पुरै बताईदिनुहोला). Then she left us immediately and moved to clean the three cups. After that, I began to talk to her husband. He asked many questions about my research and the involvement of her wife in the study. After a while, Mira joined us and remained

silently listening. I wanted to talk to her instead of the husband. However, I wondered if she never asked questions; instead, her husband was active there. Then I asked a few questions about her participation in the study; her husband overtook Mira and talked on her behalf. Again, Mira remained silent, and the husband continuously spoke. We reached the end of the informal conversations. He became satisfied and agreed to her wife's participation in the future interview. He looked at his wife. Mira nodded and silently looked at us. Finally, I requested the written informed consent, then she looked at her husband, he nodded (body language of agreement), and Mira put her signature. Furthermore, I left home hoping to meet her shortly. (Field Notes, July 31, 2021)

The above field notes reflect the husband's domination and control over the female teachers. While their husband must know that they were not actually participating in the interview but instead, they were holding the power of agreement with the interviewer. Mira seemed powerless because her husband was deciding about her participation in the study. Such a notion of powerlessness indicates the "patrilocal family system" (Ong et al., 2021), which has a long-rooted culture in most Nepali societies. Notably, even the female teachers who are supposed to be self-dependent are often dominated by their husbands, one can imagine what could be the situations of those housewives who are entirely dependent on their husbands' earnings to survive? The decisive role of husband of the female teachers is not only the case of Mira alone; instead, the interviewer encountered interference from the husband of Ranjana and Sarita. During the interview, the researcher experienced similar circumstances with Mira that her husband interfered with during the interview. It created obstacles in collecting female teachers' experiences in a naturalistic way. The interviewer maintained the field notes as:

Today I went to Sarita's home for the interview at her convenient time. Schools are closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nowadays, she struggles to take her class online from her cell phone. She offered me to sit in a chair on the open rooftop of her house. Her husband, a secondary teacher, came with her and started to speak continuously with me. Her wife remained silent. I hardly got a chance to ask my queries with Sarita for half an hour. And then, he remained silent, and then after I asked Sarita about her entry and early teaching experience. Her husband again started to clarify the query, then Sarita remained silent. I observed an interesting dynamic that could be attributed to the patriarchal society. Her husband was overtaking every question to her wife. Due to this situation, Sarita spoke less, and I realized that she hesitated to share her real stories. I re-asked a few probing questions, and she seemed shy and spoke little. Today, Sarita got only one-third time to speak due to her husband's constant supervision. As a result, I could not access the lived experiences of Sarita in a comfortable environment. This situation made me rethink searching for another alternative participant. (Field notes, August 8, 2021)

This observation from the filed notes adds an extra layer of challenge in data collection from the female teachers from cultural contexts that complicate their identity formation situations. It is not only the question of the hegemony of deep-rooted gender dominations from males to women that exist in many Nepal (Ong et al., 2021) but also the indication of the complex dynamic process (Solari & Martín Ortega, 2020). The interviewer felt that the existing sociocultural forces (Vågan, 2011) impacted the discussion from this interview. In addition, the interview influenced both the gender of her husband and mine. We cannot gauge how much of the interview's authenticity is taken away by such situations played out as external factors.

Broom et al. (2009) argued, “gender mediates the production and analysis of qualitative data” and the influence of the interviewer’s gender in this specific context” (p. 51) of the field. The “activism” of Sarita’s husband seems to give a message that Sarita as a female may not be the “knower” in this context. He assumed that he would need to help her validate her knowledge or that she did not know anything. The interviewer realized that Sarita felt shy, uncomfortable, and void of agency in expressing her own opinion through her body language. Hence, the interview became an “obligation” rather than creating a space of easy, or cozy, sharing” (Thwaites, 2017, p. 7). The interview situation was more mechanical instead of spontaneous sharing. Sarita’s husband’s dominant presence and frequent deliberations are yet another phenomenon to be studied, but it appears to be like he had to project himself as an intelligent man who knew everything and was there to support his wife. This finding is consistent with Pini (2005) as the metaphor of heterosexual, powerful, and knowledgeable men in her study in an Australian context. She further argues that “men emphasizing their heterosexuality, presenting themselves as powerful and busy, and positioning themselves as having an expert and superior knowledge” (Pini, 2005, p. 201). These kinds of situations made the interviewer think about gender roles in the interview. The interview could have been cozy if a female researcher had interviewed Sarita.

### **Power Relations in Qualitative Interview**

The researcher is related to the study phenomenon since the researcher also influences in conducting qualitative research. From the interpretivist approach, the “researcher has a significant role in co-constructing data” (Lefkovich, 2019, p. 4) with the participants during the qualitative interview. During the field data collection, particularly in the qualitative interview, the researcher is supposed to play the neutral role so that the occurring of natural data is not influenced. However, it is difficult to be neutral since a power differential exists between the interviewer and the interviewee (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). For example, the interviewer’s identity as a teacher educator and a PhD scholar could have created hesitations during the interview with the participants since they were the primary teachers. The primary teachers are at the bottom layer based on the teacher management system in Nepal, so they feel “powerless” and remain in the lower hierarchical order (Subedi, 2023). Realizing such potential power dynamics created by the hierarchical system among the Nepali school teacher, the interviewer never identified himself as a university teacher and a PhD researcher. Despite his effort to create a friendly relationship with the teachers, the first author realized that the unequal power relations between the researcher and interviewee created hesitation with the participants to share their stories openly. This notion allows us to understand the roles of hierarchy and unequal power relations created due to the different levels (i.e., school teacher vs university teacher) between the researcher and interviewee. We argue that unequal power relations, even unintentional, are created by the hierarchy significantly influencing the qualitative interview, which needs to be considered seriously during the field data collection. The power dynamics remain influential in qualitative interviews, negotiated, and constructed between the researcher and participants (Anyan, 2013). From this perspective, the interviewer had the privileged identity of a male researcher, which exists in most Nepali societies and may have created a hierarchical order and power relations with the female participants. Given that Nepali women are cornered and dominated by males (Ong et al., 2021) illustrates that “in anecdotes and stories, the women described Nepali society as being shaped by men” (p. 4). Although the interviewer was more conscious of the current gender role in Nepali society; still he experienced that the gender difference influence in creating the more comfortable environment during the interview.

Additionally, the interviewer never showed any kinds of such dominations of gender influences with the female participants. Nevertheless, the interviewer had multiple identities, such as a university teacher, a male researcher, and having teaching experiences of more than two decades may have unknowingly created power relations with the female participants because the interviewer could not mask them. Considering the notion of power relations, the interviewer tried to remain neutral so as not to make any interference from the interviewer's side in the interview process. Additionally, the interviewer tried to "communicate researcher/participant roles with the participants" (Wood et al., 2019, p. 2448) to minimize the possible power relations between the interviewer and interviewee. The interviewer has been researching teacher identity. Identity construction is a relational process (Solari & Martín Ortega, 2020). Therefore, the interviewer has tried to maintain trust and a good relationship with the participants. Despite the efforts to establish close relationships with them, the interviewer realized that the power relations acted there. For instance, Ranjana shared in the first interview:

I have no higher qualifications. I just studied IA (Intermediate in Arts). Due to my household work, I could not continue my study. I am a primary teacher. I do not know much. You (me) have studied so much. You know much more because you teach in college. I am not sure I could answer your questions correctly or not. So, it is better to give your questionnaire to me, and I will fill them out and return it to you.

The above statement indicates the multiple dimensions of power relations and the phenomenon of being a teacher. Ranjana's story suggests teacher identity is shaped by multiple factors, such as qualifications, knowledge, inferiority complex, teaching level, gender, etc. The power relations frequently act the systemic factors as well as common understanding of categorizing among the people by various measures such as education level, job status, earning from the profession etc. Due to the variations of academic qualifications (i.e., school and university teacher or PhD researcher) and the job status (i.e., primary teacher and university lecturer) between the researcher and participants unintentionally affects the qualitative interview. It perhaps could prevent the interviewer from seeking into the participants' stories with a deeper understanding. In addition, gender differences with unequal power relations create the extra layer of hegemony, making the dynamics of interviewing between the unmatched gender more complex. It denotes that gender identity dominantly played a role, particularly during the interview with the female participants by a male researcher. As a result, gender may have affected data collection from the female participants sharing their stories. All these dimensions can make an interview uncomfortable (Gillham, 2005). Consequently, Ranjana felt powerless and being with "little knowledge" due to these unequal identity dimensions that might have influenced the interview with the first author.

In a qualitative interview, "insider" and "outsider" perspectives play significant power relationship roles. Collecting data for the insider becomes convenient, while the outsider faces the challenge. As such, insider researchers can quickly build rapport with the participants. Connection making is a significant aspect of the qualitative interview (Thwaites, 2017) in obtaining participants' lived experiences. While researcher relations as an outsider create fear in the participants of violations of their information (Byrne, 2018; Seidman, 2006). Keeping the importance of insider roles in the qualitative interview, the interviewer shared his earlier experiences of working as a primary teacher with the participants to make them feel comfortable sharing their own experiences. Despite the sharing of interviewer previous identity to make sense of insider to the participants, it did not make the interviewee more comfortable in heartily sharing the lived experiences of the participants' teaching journey.

Similarly, the interview is considered an interactional activity between the interviewer and the interviewee in a localized context. For instance, (Rapley, 2001) argued for making discussions productive by creating localized interactional context between the interviewer and interviewee. Since the interviewer is from the same locality, he is familiar with and understands the local context. Considering all these issues of power relations between the researcher and research, the interviewer could still not gather the narrative having rich information on teacher identity from the female participants.

## **Discussion**

This article brings field experience to add to the discourse on the gender difference in a qualitative interview in social science in general and interviewing female teachers in exploring teachers' identities in particular. Reflecting on a male Ph.D. field researcher's experience interviewing female teachers, we argue that gender differences among the participants, particularly interviewing females by a male, can become challenging in obtaining adequate narratives to obtain rich data in particular cultural contexts. Furthermore, we agree with previous researchers that gender mediates the data collection in a qualitative interview.

The article deliberates on the gender influences in a qualitative interview on three themes: (a) dynamics of interviewing women, (b) cultural influence, and (c) power relations. First, interviewing women by a man is challenging in the sociocultural context. Interviewing a female teacher by a male researcher adds a layer of a challenge due to gender differences, complicating rapport building. Second, the current cultural context affects the qualitative interview when there is a gender difference between the researcher and participants and even when the interviewer and interviewee are from a similar culture. Additionally, one still faces a challenge in obtaining rich narratives. There is much to consider mitigating the loss of rapport or authenticity of narratives. Paying particular attention to cultural considerations such as dress-up, language, demeanor, and etiquette can go long.

Nevertheless, the participants show their behaviors explicitly or implicitly during the interview. Moreover, this study highlights another vital phenomenon of "guardianship" or "companionship" the husband's interference in this case. In such a situation, the husband of the female participant presents himself as an intelligent man in resolving the teaching-related issues. It appears this kind of behavior of the participant's husband takes away from the identity of the female teacher. Finally, power relations between the participants and the researcher, particularly in Ph.D. research, become another challenge for gathering the rich narratives from the qualitative interview.

This article has several immediate implications for the qualitative researchers who use the interview to collect data. First, it offers insight into gender roles during the interview, which can help plan research for their research project. Second, this study suggests rethinking the multiple dimensions of the qualitative interview, that is, gender matching, cultural influence, and differences in power relations that can influence gathering adequate data. Third, this study makes academic researchers, particularly the Ph.D. scholars, pay attention to gender differences while planning to interview participants of a different gender. Finally, this study examined the role of gender difference from a localized context. Given the limitations of a small sample from a male-dominated patriarchal society, the findings of this study may be generalizable to similar cultural contexts.



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