

Journal of NELTA Koshi (JoNK),
Volume 2, Issue 1, August, 2024
A Peer-reviewed Journal
Published by: NELTA Koshi Province
ISSN: 2990-7802 (Print/online)

Teachers' Strategies for Improving ESL Learners' Speaking Skills

Muna Aryal¹

¹MPhil Scholar, English Language Education at Kathmandu University School of Education

Article Info

Article History:

Received: 2/29/2024

Reviewed: May 1, 2024

Accepted: August 16, 2024

Corresponding Author:

Muna Aryal

Email: aryalmuna306@gmail.com

Copyright Information:

Copyright 2024© Author/s and
Nepal English Language Teachers'
Association, Koshi Province

Publisher:

Nepal English Language Teachers'
Association (NELTA), Koshi Province
Email: journalofneltakoshi@gmail.com

Abstract

The study examines the perception of Nepalese English teachers on the strategies employed to enhance ESL learners' speaking skills. To gather insights and experiences, interviews were conducted with two secondary-level English teachers from schools in the Kathmandu valley. The findings reveals that creating a supporting learning environment and utilizing different teaching strategies, such as task-based learning and communicative language teaching are crucial for improving students' speaking abilities. The study also highlights how socio-economic and cultural factors influence language learning, underscoring the need for the inclusive and equitable educational practices. Despite the study's contributions to understanding effective ESL teaching practices and its practical implications for educators and policymaker, effective reading strategies are underestimated. The study emphasizes the importance of adopting effective

teaching strategies and fostering supportive learning environments to enhance ESL learners' speaking skills and confidence in using English.

Keywords: ESL teaching Strategy, English speaking, speaking skills, teaching speaking

Introduction

In today's rapidly changing world, effective communication has become increasingly significant in both academic and professional contexts. As a globally dominant language, English, plays a crucial role in facilitating this essential to this communication. Therefore, English as a second language learners (ESL) need to improve their speaking abilities the most in addition to their reading, writing and listening skills. Speaking English fluently is essential for both academic achievement and navigating various professional contexts where English is used as the '*lingua franca*'. Speaking is frequently seen as the most difficult skill for ESL

learners, according to recent research, because it demands immediate verbal expression and interaction (Shabani, 2021).. Many students experience anxiety when speaking in the classroom which may be related to a fear of exposure. Additionally, difficulties in speaking may arise from various factors including a lack of engaging teaching strategies, insufficient vocabulary to express ideas, and limited opportunities for practices.

Reflecting on my journey of learning English brings to mind the challenges I faced as an ESL learner. I used to be quite reserved, and hardly rather than , hardly speaking unless directly prompted. My schooling was marked by my reticence, especially when it came to speaking English. It became evident that there was a bias among teachers, favoring those who were already proficient speakers. Activities like prayers or speaking competitions seemed reserved for the selected few fluent in English. The teaching methodology further accentuated the divide. Teachers would often conduct classes autonomously, finishing chapters, assigning tasks and departing, leaving most students silently absorbing the lesson. As Nepali is our primary language, opportunities to practice English at home were scarce. Even in English classes, instructors frequently used Nepali to teach. I distinctly remember the start of each academic year when the school imposed strict rules enforcing the use of Nepali or English? within the premises. However, this decree often faded within a month, leaving us to revert to our default mode of communication. Back then, I didn't fully grasp the implications of my silence. It was only later that I realized both the advantages and drawbacks of remaining reticent in an environment where English fluency was highly prized and unequally encouraged.

Speaking skills depends on having speaking abilities, which is the capacity to the capacity to communicate verbally. However, the examination centric approach of the Nepali educational system lacks the sufficient and scientific assessment of this skill, leading teachers as well as learners to focus not enough emphasis on them. As a result, speaking and listening skills are frequently neglected, which makes students hesitant, shy and fearful of making mistakes. This issue highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach to language acquisition that gives the same priority to all language skills and is primarily caused by the examination-focused structure of the system. Although some schools have designed courses to improve students' speaking abilities with an emphasis on oral skills, a large number of schools neglect them and lack structured support for speaking. However, this is not always the case, and one significant challenge remains to be the lack of structured support for speaking skills.

This article addresses this gap through an analysis of the approaches that teachers use to develop students speaking skills drawing on personal experiences and observations. As an ESL learner, I selected this topic to explore the role teachers play in improving students' speaking skills. This study aims to identify students' speaking difficulties and explore the strategies teachers employ to cope with these challenges. It also describes how teachers' strategies are implemented in the teaching of speaking. A substantial body of research has been conducted on teaching speaking skills globally (Thornbury, 2005; Brown, 2007). This

research aims to address the gap in under explored research on teaching speaking in Nepal by examining the experiences of English Teachers in improving students' speaking skills. The central research question guiding this research is: **'What teaching strategies and resources do teachers use to develop the speaking skills of ESL students in English classes?'** This article provides a concise of teachers' experiences, respectively, focusing on the changes encountered by teachers and their coping strategies.

Literature Review

Effective speaking is a vital aspect of language proficiency, especially for ESL (English as a Second Language) learners. This literature review explores the significance of speaking skills, the challenges ESL students face and effective teaching strategies for enhancing these skills.

Importance of Speaking Skills

Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning, involving the generation, reception and assimilation of information (Brown, 2004). For ESL learners speaking particularly helps them to enhance the skills needed to organize and clarify their ideas, which improves their capacity to communicate vocally. To develop oral skills of students', teachers need to provide appropriate materials and teaching strategies and create a good environment in the learning process for students. Despite efforts from teachers and curriculum designers, many ESL students still struggle to use English for real communication. As stated by Hedge (2000), the primary objective of teaching English as a foreign language is to equip students with effective communicative skills and grant them access to global opportunities. Thus, overcoming the obstacles encountered by ESL learners requires providing plenty of opportunities for English practice both within and beyond the classroom. As stated by Brown (2004), assessments essentially serve as a tool for determining a student's proficiency in speaking English. Overall, speaking skills are essential for learning and using a language, and teachers can help ESL students develop their speaking abilities by using efficient teaching strategies and regular practice to help them become comfortable communicators in the language.

Teaching Speaking

Speaking proficiency in ESL students' needs focused strategies and approaches since effective spoken communication is essential to language proficiency. According to Richards (2008), many language learners throughout the world place a high value on enhancing their English-speaking skills in order to take advantage of more chances for school and employment. Lack of confidence, insufficient exposure to real-world language use, and a lack of practice opportunities are common issues addressed by these learners (Ur, 1996). Teachers need to use a variety of teaching methods which encourage student engagement and actual language use in order to overcome these obstacles. Task-based learning and communicative language education are especially successful because they emphasize practical interaction and communication above rote learning (Nunan, 2004). Through the implementation of various activities like role-plays, debates, and group discussions, teachers may provide students with

authentic and varied language experiences, consequently enhancing their speaking abilities (Brown, 2007).

The skill of teaching speaking also depends extensively on assessment. Self-assessment and peer feedback are examples of formative assessments that help students track their progress over time and highlight areas for development (Harmer, 2007). In addition to assessing skill, these assessments encourage students by highlighting their achievements while setting appropriate language goals. Building on these insights, this study investigates the specific strategies employed by teachers in Nepal to improve ESL students' speaking skills, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of effective language teaching practices in this context.

Methods

In this study, I adopted an interpretative approach to deeply explore participants' experiences, as understanding individuals' subjective perspectives can reveal valuable insights into educational practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This approach enabled it to be more convenient to analyze teaching techniques comprehensively as well as the challenges in developing students speaking abilities. To collect data, I conducted semi-structured interviews with two English teachers from Kathmandu district, referred to as Participants A and Participants B, using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. The interviews utilized open-ended questions to encourage detailed responses, providing rich qualitative data on the teachers' strategies and challenges in teaching speaking skills. The data initially gathered in Nepali, were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to identify recurring themes and insights. These findings, presented under four thematic categories, aim to shed light on effective teaching practices and the challenges faced in improving students' speaking proficiency in English.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and examines the results from the interviews, focusing on key themes such as learning opportunities and the creation of learning environments. It highlights the importance of the strategies in teaching speaking and how teachers address learners' problems in ESL classrooms. These insights reveal the various strategies teachers use to enhance ESL students' speaking skills and the challenges they encounter,

Learning Opportunities

Learning opportunities are crucial for effective student education, encompassing various responsibilities within teaching. Teachers need to have the skills, equipment, and knowledge required to support students become effective communicators in social situations. This includes understand both expression and comprehension. During interviews, I gathered experiences, about how teachers narrative on learning opportunities. Regarding this my first Participant 'A' shared;

Not everyone has the same childhood. In my case I have two brothers and both were sent to boarding school for a quality education, while I was

enrolled in a local government school which limited my exposure to ESL learning opportunities. I did not get the chance to explore myself or learn English properly during my school years. After completing school, I insisted on pursuing further education despite my family's initial hesitation. My determination to overcome these limitations drove me to complete masters in English language education. Now I teach in a community school to provide better opportunities for my students and I want to ensure that other children do not face the same obstacles I did.

The reflections of Participant A illustrate the significant barriers that arise from socio-economic and gender-based discrimination while trying to access quality ESL learning opportunities. The challenges she faced including a lack of exposure and resources highlight the systematic inequalities in educational access. Her resolution to overcome these barriers and provide better opportunities for her students reflects a commitment to address these challenges and improve ESL education for future generations. Regarding on this, Participants B stated,

Even with a strong foundation, I had trouble speaking English. I was not faced with problems like financial hardship or discrimination because my father was a businessman and my mother was a Montessori teacher.” In spite of a nurturing environment, my early schooling prioritized written exams and rote learning over the development of speaking abilities. The school prioritized writing to pass board exams, leaving speaking skills underdeveloped. Later, because I was passionate about wanting to become an English teacher, I enrolled in speaking practice courses offered by different organizations. My experience shows how a lack of focus on speaking skills in the educational system may hinder the development of language proficiency even in supportive environments.

The narratives provided by Participants A and B highlight encounters and challenges faced when trying to take advantage of learning opportunities, especially when it comes to developing spoken language skills. These personal experiences emphasize how crucial it is to have safe places and adequate resources to facilitate holistic education. In order to cope with social circumstances, effective communication strategies are essential, emphasizing the need of addressing inequalities in educational access.

The participant experiences highlight the value of inclusive learning environments that encourage the growth of speaking skills. Through recognizing and addressing the different backgrounds and experiences of students, teachers may create meaningful learning opportunities that enable students to overcome obstacles and achieve success (Hughes, 2003). It is crucial from teachers to prioritize creating safe and supportive learning environments where students feel valued, respected and motivated to engage fully in their education. Teachers can equip students with the skills and confidence they need to succeed in their

language learning pursuits and manage social situations by putting into practice inclusive teaching methodologies and effective strategies for communication. Ultimately, teachers can support students in realizing their full potential by keeping the values of equity and inclusivity.

Creating Learning Environments

Creating effective environments for learning is essential for supporting students' language development. According to a recent research, creating a positive and supportive environment for learning in the classroom is essential for helping students' language abilities. For instance, Mercer (2020) highlights how collaborative learning environments support students' engagement and language acquisition. This emphasizes how important it is to have strategies and resources that support students' speaking skills and develop more confident and fluent speakers. The participant A discussed the importance of intentionally creating an environment.

Environments that promote learning must be established, they don't just happen. This speaks to the core of what makes education effective. In order for students to fully participate in their educational journeys, teachers and educational organizations must proactively create environments where they feel empowered, encouraged, and supported.

In her continuation, Participant A addressed her approach by stating that teachers who understand how important it is to create a positive learning environment can employ strategies like collaborative learning, inclusive teaching, and supportive systems for feedback. Such approaches assist in creating environments where students feel appreciated, respected, and motivated to realize their full potential. Similarly, Participant B talked about her methods for fostering a supportive environment in the classroom.

I always begin by supporting students in becoming at comfortable. I use strategies like assigning students to read books turn by turn, having them presenting on subjects they have studied, and promoting involvement in class activities. It is essential to establish an environment in which students actively participate. Allowing students to express themselves is important, even when their ideas aren't fully developed.

The strategy used by Participant B is consistent with Slavin's (2003) viewpoint, which supports moving away from a teacher-centered method and to one in which students actively explore, uncover, and apply fresh concepts on their own independently. Students' participation and speaking abilities are improved by this active role. Both participants highlighted the need for teachers to be flexible and constantly update their teaching strategies to address various learning styles. They emphasized that students can progressively develop their confidence and speaking skills by using different techniques. This approach is reinforced by the study's theoretical framework rooted in constructivist learning theory which highlights the active role students have in constructing their own knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In conclusion,

developing inclusive and supportive learning environment is essential for encouraging students' interest in and proficiency with language effectively (Bygate, 1987). By fostering such environments, teachers not only help students grow academically and personally, but they additionally encourage an eternal passion of learning and self-improvement.

Strategies for Addressing Learner Problems in Speaking

One of the most common obstacles that students face in language learning classrooms is speaking anxiety. Participant A shared personal experience during a discussion on the reasons why some students find it difficult to speak, highlighting that fear of challenges is a major barrier. She stressed the importance of fostering a safe and supportive environment where students feel free to express themselves without fear of judgment. Participant A recounts,,

Being a teacher I have realized that creating a supportive environment is essential. It is important for teachers to placing students in situations where they feel empowered. In my classroom, I prioritize inclusive teaching strategies that foster confidence and competence. I strive to ensure that every student understands how significant and valued their voices are. I have seen firsthand how speaking difficulties can impact a student's confidence which is why I work hard to create supportive environment where every student feels encouraged to participate.

Further she said that a key feature of effective learning is the active involvement of the learner's mind. Teacher needs to know the value of interactive speaking exercises in the classroom. As she believes that active participation is key to learning, she offers students opportunities to practice speaking in a supportive environment, thereby bolstering their confidence and fluency. In order to further explore the idea of speaking anxiety, participant B mentioned the pressure students experience to perform effectively in a short period of time. Regarding to this, participant B revealed,

Students often feel overwhelmed by the expectation to speak English fluently and accurately in front of their peers. Although grammar and vocabulary have a part in speaking reluctance, it is crucial to provide a calm environment that supports learning. I make it a point to create a comfortable environment where students feel at ease expressing themselves. I provide supportive feedback and encouragement to help alleviate their anxieties and build their confidence

This statement and classroom practice appear to be clarifying that teaching ways or materials make classroom meaningful and effective. Group activities, interactive activities among learners and interaction between teacher and students are the essential classroom activities which make classroom more effective (Harmer, 2007). Regarding the implementation of different strategies in classroom, I got the positive response from both of them. To sum up, the perspectives shared by both individuals highlight the significance

of compassionate teaching strategies that give priority to the wellbeing and engagement of students. Teachers can enable students to overcome speaking anxiety and succeed in their ESL learning journeys by establishing supportive learning settings and using a variety of speaking exercises.

Importance of Speaking Strategies in the Classroom

Effective speaking techniques must be implemented in the context of ESL learning, if teachers want their students to advance their language and communication skills.. These teaching methods not only help students become more proficient speakers, but they also boost their self-esteem and encourage them to engage in class discussions. Teachers may have a big impact on students' capacity to communicate successfully in the target language by giving them scheduled practice opportunities and making sure the learning environment is encouraging in relation to classroom strategies for improving students' speaking skills. As stated by Participant A:

If we don't guide students with a certain topic then no topic no preparation leads them to be unknown of how to talk and what to talk. Is teacher able to provide the enough information or students opportunities to practice target language? It is one of the most serious issues which needs to be addressed.

Participant A highlighted the significance of using various techniques to encourage students to engage in active learning. She underscored the importance of assigning discussion topics, appointing leaders, and grouping students, as crucial components of her teaching methodology. The idea highlights how crucial organized guidance is for creating effective communication. Her approach follows line with Harmer's (2007) belief that meaningful speaking exercises are essential to student engagement and language development. Her narrative's analysis highlights the need for focused and encouraging teaching strategies by showing how students may find it difficult to improve their speaking abilities without sufficient preparation and direction. Also, participant B provided information regarding the strategies for enhancing students speaking abilities. She shared:

I focus about creating a friendly environment where students are at sufficiently comfortable to take part. Adopting activities and strategies to motivate students is crucial. I provide them with topics that they can relate to, and I use monitors to ensure they are using the target language correctly, which makes the activities productive.

Participant B has demonstrated an awareness of how to overcome speaking anxiety and provide a more inclusive learning environment by focusing on establishing a supportive atmosphere and using relatable concepts. Previous research by Mendez and Marin (2007) from the University of Quintana Roo produced very good results when it comes to the application of methods. These results highlight the techniques' efficacy in encouraging student participation in speaking exercises and, as a result, in promoting excellent learning

outcomes. The statement indicates that without using relevant strategies, effective teaching and meaningful learning does not take place.

Upon analyzing the participants' perceptions, it becomes evident from the narratives that teachers must embrace the belief that children learn most effectively through active engagement. This means that for meaningful learning to occur, students should not only be exposed to ideas and concepts but also be encouraged to experience and apply them practically. Such hands-on experiences facilitate a distinct form of learning, as described by the participants. It is observed that children grasp concepts more thoroughly and perform better academically when they are directly involved and actively participate in learning activities. Furthermore, these practical experiences are often the most enjoyable for students. Hence, the optimal educational approach for teachers is one that is active and co-constructive, where students are actively involved in their learning process. The studies concluded with the opinions expressed by Participant A were very similar to that of participant B but both have limited time for practice activities. From my own experience, I can claim that student-centered activities and collaboration of learning make classroom more effective and inclusive but these activities should be related with the subject to be taught. The gap between theoretical and practical learning are the crucial issues.

Conclusion

This study examined the perspectives of Nepalese English teachers from the Kathmandu valley to explore their perception regarding ESL learners' speaking skills using an interpretative approach. It shed light on the strategies, experiences, and challenges teachers face in improving students' speaking abilities. The research highlighted that creating a supportive learning environment and employing various teaching strategies such as task based learning, communicative language teaching and this issue has not been discussed earlier fairly enough to be concluded here. are essential for developing ESL learners' speaking proficiency. Teachers' experiences revealed that overcoming challenges like speaking anxiety and limited practice opportunities is critical for student's success. Moreover, socioeconomic and cultural variables have a big impact on the quality and accessibility of education. (but is it a relevant point?).

The study provides valuable insights into effective ESL teaching practices, highlighting the importance of inclusive and supportive classroom environments. It shows how thoughtful strategies and teaching approaches can significantly enhance students' confidence in speaking English as well as in their speaking abilities in general. However, the research's limitations include a small sample size which may not fully represent broader contexts or an educational settings but it covers an almost important strategies and challenges related speaking strategies. Future research should consider larger, more varied samples and explore additional dimensions such as long term impacts of teaching strategies and perceptions of their learning experiences.

The practical implications of this study suggest teachers and policymakers should focus on implementing effective teaching strategies and creating supportive environments to improve speaking abilities of ESL students. Developing a more equitable and efficient ESL education system requires collaboration between teachers, administrators, and policymakers to address the concerns identified. Future research could provide deeper insights into maintaining and enhancing teaching practices and supporting students in diverse educational contexts.

Author's Bio

Muna Aryal is currently pursuing her MPhil in English Language Education at Kathmandu University School of Education. She teaches English at Rising Academy Pvt. Ltd. and also works as an English news writer at Mero News Media. Her areas of interest include English Language Teaching Methodology, Professional Development, and Qualitative Research, along with exploring various research fields.

References

- Brown, H. D. (2004). *Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices*. Pearson Education.
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of Language learning and teaching* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). SAGE Publication.
- Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Hedge, T. (2000). *Teaching and learning in the language classroom*. Oxford University Press.
- Hughes, A. (2003). *Testing for language teachers* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Mendez, R., & Marin, J. (2007). *Effective speaking strategies: A study at the University of Quintana Roo*. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 8(3), 215-224.
- Mercer, N. (2020). *The classroom as a learning environment: The role of language and interaction in learning*. Routledge.
- Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C. (2008). *Teaching listening and speaking: From theory to practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Shabhani, K. (2021). *Addressing the challenging of speaking in English as a second language*. *Journal of Language and Education*, 15(2), 75-89.
- Slavin, R. E. (2003). *Educational psychology: Theory and practice* (7th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Thornbury, S. (2005). *How to teach speaking*. Pearson Education.
- Ur, P. (1996). *A course in language teaching: Practice and theory*. Cambridge University Press.