Examining the Basic Level Teachers' Perspectives and Practices on ELT Curriculum

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Abstract

This study sought to answer how basic level English teachers define 'curriculum' and use it to investigate teachers' perspectives on the curriculum. The purpose of this study is to investigate the beliefs and methods used by basic level English language teachers in Nepal concerning the basic level English curriculum. A qualitative method was employed. This study presents the participants' perspectives on the basic level English curriculum and how it is really taught in classrooms. Additionally, the qualitative approach to data collecting and interpretation was used to obtain individual perspectives on how people would view and perceive the curriculum as a whole. In order to examine the experiences of the research participants, we used meaning-oriented procedures using semi-structured interviews. The study's findings showed that even though the teachers are aware of the curriculum and its significance, they are unable to put it into practice in their actual classroom settings. We can infer from the participant data that although our participants have some theoretical knowledge of the curriculum, they are unable to apply it to their real-world circumstances.

Keywords: English curriculum, narrative inquiry, qualitative research, theoretical knowledge

Introduction

Researchers required studying English at school using traditional methods like memorization and rote learning. Similarly, reading aloud to the class, writing homework assignments, and memorizing grammar rules were the main methods we used to acquire the English language. Our instructor typically uses grammatical translation techniques to teach English. They mainly concentrated on reading and writing rather than encouraging us to engage in real-world English dialogue. We could only communicate in English once we received our bachelor's degree because

they stood in front of the class and read the text line by line while translating it into our mother tongue.

We had the opportunity to focus on and think about the English curriculum and its goals to improve their English language skills as we studied curriculum development and material design. After taking these classes, we began to question why our teachers at the time could not implement alternative methods of teaching English that might have assisted us in learning the language instead of the conventional method (Willis, 1990). Why was there no connection between the curriculum and the textbook? We assumed our teachers were unfamiliar with these phrases and did not use them in classroom instruction when we examined their teaching strategies.

Similarly, we only used the textbook and syllabus when we reflected on our teaching experiences. We consulted the curriculum while creating the lesson plan. We intentionally and unintentionally neglected to help them build their speaking and listening abilities in favour of a narrow focus on writing and reading. Furthermore, we did not use other teaching methods or tactics to make learning efficient and pleasurable; we solely used the lecture method to instruct them. The audio-lingual and grammatical translation methods were used to teach English.

Curriculum Development Center (CDC, 2007) in Nepal designs and updates the curriculum as needed to meet the needs of the students. According to CDC 2007, they are making much effort to improve the curriculum, continually updating it to meet the demands of the moment in the hopes that it would be helpful for textbook developers, educational institutions, teachers, and students to implement. Hence, examining and assessing how English teachers at the fundamental level apply the curriculum to their pedagogical practices in the classroom is crucial.

The authors learned from reviewing many studies that several research studies have been conducted to examine curriculum analysis, its flaws, instructors' views toward the curriculum, curriculum development, etc. Yet, there hasn't been any comprehensive research on how Basic Level English teachers see and use curriculum. Many studies have been conducted on teachers' planning, implementation, and practices, but no one has addressed the issue of Basic Level English Teachers' perceptions and whether or not they implement them in their classrooms (Margot & Kettler, 2019; Wozney, 2006). This study primarily sought to understand how these people perceive and use instruction and learning. They connect their theoretical knowledge to real-world contexts if they are aware that the curriculum requires it. In addition to these and other differences in time, place, and context between our study and theirs, the subjects were chosen using different

methodologies and data-gathering technologies. This is how our research tries to investigate how teachers perceive and use their teaching-learning process.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the beliefs and methods used by basic-level English language teachers in Nepal concerning a basic-level English curriculum. This study seeks to provide an answer to the query: How do Basic Level English Teachers view the curriculum, and how do they put it into practice in the classroom?

The authors conducted some research to examine what other researchers had looked at in relation to the problem. Initially, writers observed that Dhungana (2020) researched "Cultural Diversity Responsive Instructional Strategies: Investigation in the Basic Education Curriculum of Nepal". His study examined how Nepal's basic education curricula and classroom practices included instructional methodologies that were sensitive to cultural diversity. Similarly, in English language education curricula in Iran: Design and Implementation, by Atai and Mazlum (2013), the study looks into how the Iranian Ministry of Education plans its English Language Teaching (ELT) curricula and how teachers put them into practice. This study also shows that constructivism theory and communication channels between planning and practice levels are top-down and that the political and ideological ideas of material developers are equally significant to their expertise. The gap between plans and practices is ultimately attributed to a highly centralized policymaking process that excludes local policymakers (such as teachers). In their study, teachers and the implementation of a New English Curriculum in Malaysia, Hardman and Rahman (2014b) sought to determine the degree to which teachers are using a communicative language teaching (CLT) strategy that primarily emphasizes memorization, recitation, instruction, and exposition while severely limiting opportunities for students to engage in dialogue and discussion.

Literature Review

English is one of the six official languages of the United Nations and the primary language of communication on the global stage. It is introduced right at the start of class in Nepal. Most schools also use English as a language of instruction besides Nepali. This revision is the product of a continuing process that was encouraged by the National Education Policy Commission (1992), which emphasized continually updating and upgrading school curricula. The two primary goals of English instruction in Nepal are to exchange thoughts, feelings, and opinions with English speakers and learn much from the electronic and printed forms written in English. The four language abilities of listening, speaking, reading, and writing were equally emphasized in the new curriculum for grades 6 to 8. All

parts of learning should be practised in the classroom to strengthen these four skills. This curriculum recommends that all teachers approach their contents and student evaluation methods using feasible, reasonable, and appropriate techniques. Since the curriculum is competency-based, evaluations should be focused on how well students perform (Gonczi, 1994). The core of 21st-century skills is to emphasize what students can accomplish with their information rather than the specific knowledge units they possess. So, the lessons and academic material covered in a school or a particular course or programme are what we call curriculum. In other words, it is a strategy designed to direct classroom instruction. Since the term "curriculum" is so broad and encompasses a wide range of possible educational and instructional practices, it is vital to remember that educators frequently have a precise, technical meaning in mind when they use the term. This is because the term includes learning standards, learning outcomes, teaching and learning approaches, materials, etc. Since curriculum is regarded as the beating heart of any educational institution, schools and universities could only function with it (Apple, 1993). Due to changes in our society, its significance in the formal education curriculum has evolved into a dynamic process.

The teacher serves as a conduit for students to apply the material to their work. Professional teachers should be familiar with their topic's curriculum before beginning lessons so they can adjust or adapt their instruction in accordance with the subject matter and learning objectives. In their research, Hardman and Rahman (2014) make the case that teachers should need more training and assistance in interactive and discourse approaches that improve their capacity to pose thought-provoking queries and offer high-quality feedback using probes, comments, or questions that build on students' responses to promote longer contributions. It means that teachers may not be able to bring about positive changes in their student's behaviour, attitudes, and learning if they are unfamiliar with the specific goals of the curriculum and its implementation process or if they pay little attention to the goals of the curriculum in their teaching-learning process (Fuller & Bown, 1975; Mulang & Putra, 2023). Constructivism values the learner's past knowledge and views learning as an internal process. Constructivism refers to a learner-centred environment in which diverse views are represented and appreciated and where knowledge and the creation of knowledge are interactive, individual, and collaborative processes. The curriculum at the fundamental level encourages teachers to support pupils in creating their past knowledge. In a constructivist classroom, the teacher takes on the role of a mentor for the students, acting as a bridge or scaffold and assisting the students to the extent of their zone of proximal development. Through engaging in critical thinking, collaborative learning, communicative

learning, and creative learning, the students are motivated to expand their existing knowledge.

Methods and Procedures

A paradigm aids researchers in improved practice in the field by making it easier to comprehend and express thoughts about the nature of reality (Rehman & Alharthi, 2018). According to the interpretive methodology, social phenomena must be seen "through the participants' eyes rather than the researcher" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.21 as cited in Harris, 2021). The interpretive methodology seeks to comprehend social phenomena in their historical and cultural contexts. In an interpretive study, we attempted to investigate various perspectives on the curriculum from various participants in their implementation of the English curriculum through interviews. Using interviews, we learned about and analyzed the instructors' perceptions of the curriculum, what it taught, and how it was represented in their classroom instruction. We attempted to comprehend the various ways that students from various contexts and cultures view and interact with the curriculum while conducting our research on the interpretive paradigm. We developed how they view curriculum and their implementation method in the classroom based on their context and experience using several research questions. Similarly, we employed narrative enquiry as a research design.

Three Basic Level English Teachers—designated as P1, P2, and P3—from three schools were chosen for our study. We gathered some of their personal data. Via the interviewing process, we gathered information, which we subsequently examined, evaluated, and thematized. P1 has a bachelor's degree in education (B.Ed.) and is pursuing a master's degree (M.Ed.) in English language teaching. She has spent 11 years instructing English in a public school. We've chosen her since she teaches English at the elementary level in our research. P2 completed two master's degrees (Master's in Arts and Master's in Education). He has more than 24 years of teaching experience in a government school. From elementary to upper secondary levels, he has taught English. P3 comes from the same stream as education. He holds a bachelor's degree in education and has been a basic level English instructor for more than 12 years.

Quality Standards

In order to be authentic, one must put aside worries about the validity and reliability of research and focus instead on the value of the research and its effects on the people being studied in the culture or community (Lincoln & Guba, 1989 as cited in Healy & Perry, 2000). In a qualitative study, credibility is established

by demonstrating the four attributes of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). The protection of human subjects through the use of suitable ethical norms is critical in any research project, according to Arifin (2018). In a similar vein, we had a greater responsibility as researchers to ensure that the volunteers were not harmed. If they encountered difficulties or had trouble understanding the questions, we restated them in plain English and in a straightforward manner throughout the interview. In a similar vein, we never directly questioned them. We made an effort to create a welcoming atmosphere both before and during the interview to make them feel at ease. In the same way, we have not revealed their true identities by using their pseudonyms instead of their real names.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data collection instrument of our study was semi-structured interview guidelines. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, analyzed and then thematized.

Results and Discussion

The data has been analyzed and interpreted into six themes as below.

From the Perspective of the Teachers, What does the Word "Curriculum" Mean?

The English Language Curriculum states that it offers a larger viewpoint where various aspects of the teaching process such as goal, content, methodology, and evaluation are covered. Tanner (2006) provides the definition of curriculum, which is "the planned and guided learning experiences and intended outcomes, formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experiences under the auspices of the school, for the learners continuous and skillful growth in personal social competence" (p. 13). Three English teachers at the elementary level that we spoke with during interviews revealed four different perspectives on the subject of curriculum.

In an interview, one of the participants, P1, said: *Without the following Curriculum, we cannot reach our destinations or meet real goals.*

What exactly does the term "race course" mean? What kind of path does it provide for the teachers in terms of learning and imparting knowledge? And how does it help teachers stay on the correct path while engaging students in learning? These inquiries appeared crucial in constructing the significance of the narrative indicated above. According to Willson (2005), the word "curriculum" originally meant "to run a course" in its early Latin form. Curriculum includes all of the activities that take place in the classroom as well as after-school activities,

counselling, and interpersonal interactions. Curriculum can be compared to a road that directs teachers to the proper path for teaching and learning. Similar to that, it provides teachers with guidance on what to teach, how to teach, why to teach, etc. Similarly, participant, P2, expressed different views regarding the term: *Curriculum is the main framework to meet the real objectives; it is a broad term.*

Similarly, participant P3 said: *The Curriculum is a teaching and learning plan. It is a framework that includes class-wise objectives, all the appropriate activities, materials, and techniques.*

This remark shows that curriculum serves as a foundation for all of the main pedagogical objectives in this way. We questioned and had a discussion about how our participants felt about the term "curriculum" after hearing their opinions. The term "curriculum" is generally used to refer to the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn, which includes the learning standards or learning objectives. Our participants have some understanding of what is meant by the phrase. The term "curriculum" is not just used in this context, so what are the items that the redesigned curriculum was primarily focused on when we read other study papers and books to investigate this? We discovered that curriculum is more extensive than what our participants said. According to Scott (2014), curriculum serves as the foundation for ontological and epistemological viewpoints and the relationships between them. It is a manner of combining all of these ideas into a theory that specifies the requirements for an educational setting and its set of guiding principles. It denotes the inclusion of economics, autonomous instrumentalism, critical instrumentalism, cultural transmission, innovative pedagogical experiment, and epistemic foundationalism in the curriculum. This indicates that a curriculum is not just for acquiring the English language. But it also involves general knowledge, linguistic and cultural awareness, learning-how-to-learn, sociocultural awareness, and communication.

Contents of English Language Curriculum

When we interviewed three participants about what curriculum includes, P1 said: *Basically, the text includes listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Apart from that, grammar is also included there.* Similarly, P2 contended that all four skills are forced on communicative skills. They asserted that all four language skills— listening, speaking, reading, and writing—as well as grammar—were present in their responses to our P1 and P2. The phrase "curriculum" is a broad one, as we all know. Basic English education is not just restricted to these regions.

When we examined "Basic level English Grammar," these included grammar, communicative language teaching to make them able to communicate in English,

grade- and subject-specific objectives, evaluation procedures, teaching activities, language functions, competency in grammatical discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic levels, additional materials sought for extensive practice, learn to think critically and creatively to develop the language skills by fostering tolerance. After examining the Revised Basic Level English Curriculum, we discovered that P1 and P2 participants did not pay much attention to the Curriculum since they were unable to reply to its main points. Also, P3 said grade-wise objectives, subject-wise objectives, evaluation procedure, national objectives, teaching techniques, and activities. Compared to P1 and P2, P3 demonstrated a greater understanding of the Curriculum's key concepts through their responses.

Relationship between Textbook and Curriculum

Textbooks are crucial promotional tools for particular courses. According to Robitaille and Travers (1992), the content of textbooks and how they are used directly affect students' learning. We conducted an interview to learn more about the connection between textbooks and curricula and to get an answer to the question: Does it influence the Curriculum's main objectives? Here are the opinions of our participants.

> A textbook is a tool, but it is not much good; there is a lack somewhere, so while using these tools, teachers are not able to get the intended outcomes from their pupils, which they should get. (P1)

Similarly, another participant viewed:

> In the curriculum, there are many activities, techniques, and facilitation processes, but it is limited in the textbook, so we could not involve our students' insufficient activities. As a result, we as teachers could not get the intended outcomes from the pupils. We realized that textbooks cannot focus on all the objectives. All the things are not included in the Curriculum. Though the textbook is the mediator, it cannot support achieving all the educational goals. There is a listening activity, but there is no script and audio-visual method, or equipment; teachers also cannot find related listening activities on the Internet. Therefore, lack of activities, materials, and equipment, so we cannot involve our students in a listening activity to develop listening skills. For speaking and reading, there is not much activity. The textbook cannot reflect all the objectives of the curriculum. (P2)

Despite the fact that textbooks are commonly regarded as a vehicle for the promotion of effective teaching and learning, teachers continue to struggle to achieve the key curriculum objectives that were intended by the authors. They said that because

there are insufficient speaking, reading, writing, and listening activities, textbooks are unable to significantly influence teachers, students, and schools. Because they are unable to engage their students in a variety of appropriate activities that will help them acquire the necessary skills and knowledge, Nepali teachers are not very satisfied with the textbooks they use on a daily basis (Khanal, 2023; Koirala, 2023; Rana, 2023; Sharma, 2023). Additionally, the textbook still does not adequately reflect all of the major curriculum objectives.

Instructional Planning

Before entering the classroom, we questioned our participants about how they got ready to educate their kids. Does curriculum come up at all? One of our P1 participants stated:

> We have been teaching English for 11 years. We are experienced English teachers, so we do not need to prepare a lesson plan, but we make classroom activities and objective points wisely.

Similarly, another participant, P2, said that,

> before going to the class, we prepare by how to teach, what to teach, and when to teach, how much to teach. We do not prepare the lesson plan daily. We think that we are experienced teachers to do not need to prepare the lesson plan daily.

When we looked at it from these two angles, we came to the conclusion that teachers might become uninformed while they are instructing. A lesson plan, according to Nesari and Heidari (2014), is a written description of the educational process that specifies what, when, where, and how learners should study, as well as how they should be evaluated. One of the most important components of the educational process is a lesson plan. Nepali instructors, however, appear to be underutilized in terms of enhancing the educational process in Nepal. They don't have a lesson plan, which makes teaching and learning tedious. Language teachers must consider their lesson plans carefully before they begin teaching in order to avoid boring their students. To do this, they must use the right methods, strategies, activities, and materials that support a detailed lesson plan. An efficient lesson design can assist teachers in overcoming these obstacles (Rita et al., 2023). While the Basic English Curriculum in Nepal instructs instructors to write lesson plans, experienced teachers are in autopilot mode and believe they need not alter their pedagogical approaches (Bryant, 2023). They don't have a lesson plan prepared when they enter the classroom, which prevents them from getting the desired outcome from their mixed-ability class. Teachers should therefore be clear about their main goals when teaching a particular subject.

Pedagogical Practices by Teachers

Quality teaching, according to Farquhar (2003), is defined as pedagogical strategies that make it easier for diverse children to access information, activities, and opportunities to advance their skills in ways that build on prior knowledge, support learning how to learn, and lay a solid foundation for future learning about the objectives of the early childhood curriculum... and cultural, community, and family values. To find out if they use the learning principles in accordance with the Curriculum, how do English teachers at the fundamental level execute the Curriculum? We questioned them, and they provided the following responses:

P1 said:

> We use fewer teaching materials. We involve students in group work and pair work while doing any activities in the classroom. While doing activities, we become less passive, and we try to make them more active. To enhance their speaking skills, we use presentations, questions answers. We do not see the Curriculum while using activities and techniques. We use those techniques and learning principles according to the Curriculum. Sometimes we involve our students in several activities according to the situation. We use a deductive, inductive approach.

Similarly, P2 said:

> We do not implement all the activities and materials that have been mentioned in the Curriculum. While using activities, we prefer from the textbook and a little bit from the Curriculum, and we use some activities based on our experience.

Although using a variety of activities and materials in the classroom, they were unable to influence the person in a way that produced the desired results. According to Kapur (2018), effective pedagogical practices include pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, pedagogical content, and curriculum knowledge. To comprehend some of the fundamental concepts, such as the principles of teaching and learning, is crucial. As was already mentioned, when teachers use their particular resources, materials, methods, concepts, and explanations to convey information and instruction to the pupils, pedagogical practice becomes innovative. The teaching-learning concepts must be understood in order to improve educational practices.

Assessment Practices by Teachers

P1 expressed his assessment procedure as,

> All the assessment procedures are done by our schools. We use formative and summative assessment systems to assess our student's outcomes. We use CAS

as well; at the end of the session, we give them marks based on their behaviour, classroom performance, discipline, etc.

They mostly focused on formative and summative evaluations when we questioned them about their assessment method to evaluate student results. Even if they employ CAS, they are still unable to provide them with effective solutions to tackle their true challenges and learning weaknesses. Similarly, the updated basic level curriculum put more emphasis on speaking and listening than just reading and writing. Nevertheless, we were unable to gain a response to the question of whether this was how teachers were supposed to evaluate their students' speaking and listening abilities.

On the contrary, another participant P2 said that:

Mostly we focused on CAS; we assessed learners' individual overall development. Their attendance, their attitudes, and their behaviours, we evaluate all the students' overall individual development. Extra classes for weak students.

We also included some questions about this subject in an effort to learn more about how instructors view Curriculum and the implementation process, as well as to evaluate participants' opinions on how crucial curriculum knowledge is to effective classroom instruction. We draw the conclusion that we, as teachers, cannot accomplish the educational goal without a Curriculum from the perspectives of the participants. Teachers require a curriculum to help them choose appropriate methods and give them the knowledge and experiences they need. According to Pandey (2008), "Curriculum sheds light on the necessity of the learners, society, and the nation," the opinions of the participants are becoming less and less comparable to his. It implies that it is not the sole insignificance in society at large, both within and outside of the classroom. Similarly to this, Liu (2011) contends that the Curriculum aids teachers in designing learning activities that shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach, from knowledge transmission to knowledge construction.

The primary goals of the English curriculum are to promote learner autonomy, communicative proficiency in the English language, and active classroom engagement. Without a curriculum, teachers cannot expect their students to perform well. We can compare teaching and learning activities without the following Curriculum to a ship without a rudder in a metaphorical sense (Stevens and Cooper, 2023). We learned from their opinions that they are aware of the value of Curriculum in achieving all of the pedagogical goals and objectives (Alshumaimeri, 2023). We realized that our participants (P1, P2, and P3) did not adequately implement the curriculum after studying their points of view. They further asserted that while they

are aware that we teachers must implement the curriculum to improve the learning environment, they are having trouble doing so for a variety of reasons, including time constraints, the academic level of the students, the nature of the curriculum, etc. Also, it is clear from P1's perspective that she lacks knowledge regarding the application of the curriculum.

Conclusion

Rather than learning English by communication, pupils are compelled to acquire it through memory. Students need to learn how to use English in everyday life since they are used to memorizing and practising reciting rather than communicating and interacting with others. The course Curriculum Development and Materials Design helped us realize that, to make teaching and learning successful, systematic, and effective, we as teachers must adhere to the curriculum. The curriculum directs the teacher to concentrate on the proper teaching strategies, methods, techniques, goals, and other objectives. Every teacher must accept and adhere to the National Education Commission's Curriculum to satisfy students' particular requirements in the classroom, as demonstrated by the writers' described experiences above. The significant stakeholders should execute the curriculum to improve teaching and learning and increase students' proficiency in the English language (i.e. teachers). The "curriculum" is the name for the broadest arrangement of instruction, involving developing, implementing, and assessing any strategy for teaching and learning English (Christon & Murray, 2014). Using this definition, it is apparent that the term "curriculum" does not just refer to a syllabus, which is a list of what needs to be taught or learnt.

As a result, the curriculum supports the teacher in allowing students to engage in communicative, experiential, and constructivist approaches that create a learning environment with lots of chances for learners to participate, explore, and take ownership of their learning (Atleib, 2013; Flynn et al., 2003). This study investigated how elementary English language teachers relate the English curriculum to their daily practice. A significant international language and method of communication is English. According to the provisions set by the educational regulations, English may also be utilized as a medium of teaching in all schools in Nepal in addition to the Nepali language. From primary to secondary levels, English is taught as one of the required topics in Nepal.

Conferring to Ahmed (2013), in the classroom, kids become passive and have little influence over their learning, hindering their personal and academic development. Also, from what we saw during our teaching and learning session, teachers place very little emphasis on good listening habits. According to Cheung

(2010), listening comprehension should receive more attention because it is a prerequisite for other abilities and should be the prominent ability learned when learning a language. Teachers can only expect students to function at the desired level in four language skills with enhancing their listening skills.

Three Basic level English teachers from three separate government schools in the Kathmandu Valley participated in our study. They both agree that in order to maximize their students' learning, they engage them in a variety of activities and employ a variety of methods, approaches, and resources. They admitted, however, that they did not finish the curriculum. Similarly, they mentioned how much teaching experience they do have. They do not need to go through the curriculum when teaching English because of their prior teaching expertise. These experiences have shaped their pedagogical and instructional methods. It means we can state unequivocally that, despite their knowledge of the English curriculum and the significance of achieving the level-appropriate objectives, teachers are not putting it into practice or imparting knowledge based on their own experiences.

In addition, when we asked them if the textbook helped them reflect the main curricular objectives, the responses from all three participants were essentially the same: not much. We might draw the conclusion that the textbook we use to teach our kids English does not provide the instructor with enough activities to adequately develop the four language skills.

Moreover, several English books lack a listening exercise script. Similarly to this, we were unable to determine whether they actually implemented the curriculum in their teaching and learning when we attempted to investigate their implementation process. It means time is also one of the main reasons that hinder them from adopting the curriculum. We can infer from the participant data that although our participants have some theoretical knowledge of the curriculum, they are nevertheless unable to apply it to their real-world circumstances.

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