TEACHERS' EXPERIENCE ON IMPROVING ELT LEARNERS' SPEAKING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how English language teachers (ELTs) have improved their students' speaking abilities in the context of Nepal. With the rapid pace at which the world is changing and the emphasis on communication, especially in English, students encounter a number of obstacles in their efforts to improve their speaking skills. Drawing upon qualitative methodology, interviews were carried out with two ELTs from the Kathmandu Valley to find out their viewpoints on teaching strategies, learning environments, and approaches to addressing learner challenges. The results show that there are a number of important obstacles, including speaking nervousness, a lack of learning opportunities, and gaps in knowledge between theory and practice. By highlighting interactive teaching techniques and student-centered approaches, both participants emphasize the crucial part that teachers play in creating inclusive and encouraging learning environments. In order to enhance equitable access to high-quality education, the study urges on stakeholders to address systemic issues and support a holistic approach to learning languages. Overall, this study shed light on the difficulties involved in teaching languages and highlights how important it is for teachers to support their students' confidence and speaking ability in the language.

Key Words: *Strategy, English speaking, student's difficulties in speaking, teaching speaking*

Introduction

There is no doubt, the world in which we live is changing rapidly and in a significant way. With all of these developments communication has become more important in academic settings as well as in all professional contexts. English is a language that is widely used for communication worldwide, thus English language learners need to improve English speaking abilities in addition to their reading, writing and listening comprehension. According to Shabani, English language learners reflect speaking as the most demanding skills compared to other English skills (Cited in E1-Sakka, 2016). Similarly, speaking skill comes before reading and writing as most of the students feel anxiety to be exposed, they seem difficult to

speak in the classroom. However, there are many other reasons why individuals find it difficult to communicate, including a lack of engaging teaching strategies or techniques, a lack of ideas to share, a lack of vocabulary to articulate those ideas, and a lack of exposure to speaking.

Reflecting on my journey of learning English brings to mind the challenges I faced. I used to be quite reserved, 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 select 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 being 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 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.

However, the speaking skill refers the ability to express themselves, through speech or oral language and also it comes first before writing and reading but most of the students feel anxiety (Jones, 2019). In Nepalese education system, however, the examination system does not test oral language skills, they are not assessed in exams, resulting in a lack of emphasis on these skills by both teachers and learners. Consequently, listening and speaking abilities are often neglected, leading to students who may feel hesitant, shy, or fearful of making mistakes. This issue is largely due to the examination-focused nature of the system and highlights the need for a more holistic approach to language learning that prioritizes all language skills. Most of the schools in Nepal have developed a curriculum which leads to the growth of learners speaking skills and English is the one of the curriculums in the school systems sets as a higher priority.

Importance of Speaking Skills

Speaking is an interactive process of meaning building that involves the creation, reception, and assimilation of information, as described by Brown (2004). Speaking helps pupils develop the abilities needed to organize and clarify their ideas, which improves their capacity to communicate vocally. To develop oral skills of student's teachers, need to provide appropriate materials and teaching strategies and create a good environment in the learning process for students. Although the teachers and curriculum design have made effort to help students develop their speaking skill, many of the students are not in position to use English for real communication. As stated by (Hedge, 2000), the main goal of teaching English as a foreign language is to enable students to communicate in English and to offer them a window to the world. As a result, providing plenty of opportunities for English practice both within and outside of the classroom is essential to resolving learners speaking challenges. In essence, a test is a tool used to assess a person's knowledge, skill, or competence in a certain area (Brown, 2004). In overall, speaking abilities are crucial for both language learning and speaking. Teachers can assist students in improving their speaking skills and becoming competent and confident English communicators by giving them practice opportunities and utilizing efficient teaching techniques.

Teaching Speaking

English is learnt widely either for general or specific purpose in formal as well as information and education from the schools as well as universities or colleges. Developing speaking skills need some strategies or ways to make them easier to learn as speaking confidently is a crucial skill of language of learning. The research explores the teachers' strategies in improving student's difficulties in English speaking. According to Richard (2008), a large proportion of language learners globally place a high priority on learning English in order to improve their speaking talents. As a result, developing speaking fluency becomes essential. It is my belief that teachers are essential construct in helping learners develops their oral communication abilities. In order to foster a learning environment where students find learning to be pleasurable and engaging, educators must investigate successful tactics and procedures. Additionally, Smith (2016) highlights how crucial it is to give students chances to practice speaking in contexts that are real. These kinds of chances let students use their language abilities in context, which helps them become more confident and fluent speakers. Smith's study emphasizes how important it is for teachers to create assignments and activities that encourage participation and practical communication.

This article explores the strategies used by teachers in developing speaking skills of students. Based on my experiences as a learner, I have selected this as research issues to find out the role of teachers on developing oral skills of the students. The aim of this research is to describe the implementation of teacher strategies in teaching speaking, to explore students' difficulties in speaking and to describe the strategies of the teachers in overcoming students' difficulties. In the context of under explored research on teaching speaking in Nepal, this study aims to fill the gap by investigating the experiences of English teachers in enhancing students' speaking skills. The central question of research is: 'What kind of teaching strategies and resources does the teacher use to develop speaking skills of English class?' the article provides a concise analysis of the teachers' experiences, respectively, focusing on the changes they encountered and their coping strategies.

Methodological Stand

Using a qualitative research methodology under the interpretivist paradigm, this study explores the teaching strategies used to improve English speaking skills. Qualitative data was collected utilizing organized interview schedules through in-depth interviews with two English language teachers. This approach, which is open-minded, makes it easier to directly examine participants' viewpoints. According to Ary et al. (2010), interviews are a vital tool for getting the opinions, beliefs, and feelings of participants and enabling them to express themselves honestly. The purpose of the interviews was to learn more about the reasons behind students' difficulty speaking English and the effectiveness of different approaches in resolving these issues. Throughout the data gathering process, the research maintained the participants' privacy and well-being in accordance with ethical and legal standards. The participants identified as Participants A (a government school English teacher and Participants B (a private school English teacher) from Kathmandu Valley, contributed to the study.

The objective of this study is to explore the teaching strategies used in teaching speaking skills in English language and their effect on students' performance and what sort of strategies in teaching should be implemented to develop the fluency of students. To achieve this objective, participants were asked to respond to their teaching experiences, teaching strategies so far what they found as a result of implementing different activities for improvements of speaking skills of the students. According to the teachers interviewed in the qualitative study, implementation of strategies they used has the impact as discussed below. Here, I tried to know the experience and understanding about the condition of students on speaking activities. The information obtained in Nepali language from the participants was first transcribed coded them and then finding were drawn under four themes.

Results and Discussion

Learning Opportunities

Learning opportunities are crucial for effective student education, encompassing various responsibilities within teaching. According to Hughes (2003), the main objective of spoken language instruction is to develop students' ability to communicate effectively in social situations, which includes comprehending and expressing oneself. In order to do this, educators need to be equipped with the skills, resources, and information necessary to teach their pupils. I heard a variety of stories from my participants during our interviews about how they have gone about offering opportunities for learning.

My participant A shared that *her personal experiences, revealing that she faced the gender discrimination in her own family during her childhood.* Participant A, who is from Sinduli, talked about her own experiences and disclosed that she was discriminated against based on her gender as a youngster in her own home. She attended the local government school, as opposed to her brothers who were sent to Kathmandu for higher study. She expressed disappointment at not having had the chance to fully realize her abilities and that she had not learned or spoken English in school. She worked and put in a lot of effort to gain information and abilities since she was passionate about continuing her education. *She eventually moved to Kathmandu to complete her master's degree in English language teaching and started working as a teacher in government schools with the intention of protecting other kids from the challenges she had to overcome.* My second participant's narrative is very different from the first participant's.

Similarly, my second participant B shared that *though she gets the proper learning environment since her childhood, still she had difficulties in speaking the English language.* She said that her mother was a Montessori teacher and her father a businessman; she did not face any problem such as financial, discrimination. She further narrated *that in her early learning period she did not face any serious activities regarding speaking. School has always given her priority to the writing skills so that students can pass the board exam for that we only focused on rote learning.* Later, she did speak practice course from various institutions because since early age she set her mind in English teaching as career. Both participants' narration concluded that they had different background support and less speaking learning opportunity in school level education.

Moreover, the narratives provided by the participants A and B highlight the variety of experiences and obstacles faced while trying to take advantage of learning opportunities, especially when it comes to acquiring a spoken language. Their experiences highlight how important it is to have safe spaces and sufficient

resources to facilitate holistic education. Effective communication techniques are critical for navigating social circumstances, as Hughes (2003) highlights, underscoring the significance of resolving inequalities in educational access. Teachers can work to create inclusive learning environments that enable students to reach their full potential by being aware of and responsive to these obstacles. Finally, the narratives that participants A and B gave highlighted how important it is for teachers to create inclusive learning settings that support the growth of speaking abilities. Through acknowledging and addressing the varied backgrounds and experiences of students, teachers may provide purposeful learning opportunities that enable learners overcome challenges and achieve success. It is essential that instructors place a high priority on creating secure and encouraging environments where students feel appreciated, respected, and inspired to take an active role in their education. Teachers can provide students with the skills and confidence they need to succeed in their language learning pursuits and navigate social situations by implementing inclusive teaching tactics and effective communication techniques. Ultimately, teachers may assist students in realizing their potential by upholding the values of equity and inclusivity.

Creating Learning Environments

Interacting with someone who does not speak the language as their first language can be quite difficult, particularly if they are not proficient in it. This deficit frequently causes a person to be reluctant to speak while communicating verbally. For instance, Smith and Conti (2020) found that interactive and supportive classroom settings significantly improve students' speaking proficiency and willingness to communicate. These findings emphasize the need for strategies and tools that support students' speaking skills, enabling them to become more fluent and self-assured in their language learning process.

With this regard, participant A *emphasized the necessity of creating positive learning environments, asserting that they do not naturally occur but must be intentionally crafted.* It really speaks to the core of what makes education effective. Her intension is to emphasize how educators and institutions need to take the initiative to create environments that are favorable to learning. It highlights the conscious work needed to create settings where students feel empowered, encouraged, and supported to participate completely in their educational journeys. She further shared *that teachers who understand the value of intentionally creating and maintaining positive learning environments might use tactics like inclusive teaching methods, group projects, and encouraging feedback systems.* By doing this, they may establish environments where students feel appreciated, respected, and motivated to realize their greatest potential.

Participant B further shared *in case of opportunities to give students in class, she always tried to make them comfortable first then adopt strategies like make them to read book turn wise, make presentation on topic whatever she teaches, encourage them to participate in activities that schools organize.* She shares her concept that *creating a learning speaking, active participants are important, teacher should ignore what students talk about that they talk about something.* According to this perspective (Slavin, 2003), students learn best when provided with opportunities to explore, discover, and apply new information and ideas independently. This theory advocates for a shift in the traditional teacher-centered approach to education, encouraging students to take a more active role in the learning process rather than passively absorbing information from the instructor.

Similarly, my participants got similar ideas that teaching can find students with different learning styles, which require that teachers have to be updated with diverse methods, strategies and technique of teaching. By employing these strategies, students gradually enhance their speaking skills and boost their self-assurance. The theoretical framework of this study is rooted in constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes the active role of students in constructing their own knowledge. Both participants in my study discussed the strategies they employ to empower their students to engage in oral activities confidently. Teachers need to promote a culture of ongoing growth and reflection in addition to providing supportive learning settings. Both Participants A and B underlined how crucial it is to modify instructional techniques in order to satisfy students' changing demands. Teachers can pinpoint areas for growth and adjust their methods by continually assessing the progress of their students and asking for feedback. By establishing a commitment to continuous professional development, educators may be sure they will always be competent in their roles and able to engage and inspire students. Teachers also give students important life skills by encouraging them to take on difficulties and persist in the face of difficulty by modeling a growth mindset and exhibiting a willingness to learn from their own experiences.

At the end, it comes up with teacher plays a very crucial role in developing child interest towards a subject or the language? Teachers can provide meaningful learning experiences that enhance students' academic and personal growth by fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments. These environments encourage a lifetime passion of study and self-improvement in addition to language development.

Strategies for Addressing Learner Problems in Speaking

One of the most common obstacles that students face in language learning classrooms is speaking anxiety (MacIntyre, 2007). Participant A shared personal

experience during a discussion on the reasons why some students find it difficult to speak, highlighting that that fear of challenges is a major barrier. Her statement, "*I remember feeling afraid of being laughed at when I struggled to speak,"* emphasized the significance of creating a secure and encouraging environment where students can express themselves without fearing about being judged. According to Participant A,

It is important that teachers avoid situations where students feel vulnerable. I prioritize using inclusive teaching strategies in my classroom that promote confidence and competence. I want my students to understand how significant and valued their voices are." "I've had students who struggle with speaking, and I know firsthand the impact it can have on their confidence," That's why I attempt to create a classroom atmosphere where every student feels supported and encouraged to participate."

She highlighted the need of activity in learning, saying that mental engagement on the part of the learner is essential to successful learning. She stressed the value of interactive speaking exercises in the classroom, adding that effective speaking exercises may be quite interesting for students. She added that she believes that active engagement is crucial to learning and that by using dynamic speaking exercises, she gives students a supportive environment to practice speaking, which boosts their confidence and fluency. In her continuing discussion of speaking fear, Participant B brought out the pressure students face to do quality work in limited periods of time. In my experience, participant B said,

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 (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). 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 language learning

journeys by establishing supportive learning settings and using a variety of speaking exercises.

Importance of speaking strategies in the classroom

The importance of speaking strategies in the classroom was a focal point of my inquiry while questioning my participants about their classroom practices aimed at enhancing student speaking skills or the methods they employ for this purpose. From A participant perception, I knew that she is aware about using different methods and techniques of adopting it in a different way. While teaching she always focus on active interaction for students. She explores that she adopts strategies like grouping students into different study group, appointing leaders and providing them a certain topic, make them concentrate on it after that asking them for preparation and having the discussion. This is consistent with studies conducted by Nunan (1991), who highlighted the importance of interactive activities for language learning. Teachers can better adapt their methods to fit the varied requirements of students by tying classroom practices to well-established research, which will ultimately lead to more meaningful learning experiences. She further says that *if we don't guide students with a certain topic then no topic no preparation leads them to 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 most serious issues which are needed to be address.

Further, Participant B highlighted her perception on teaching strategies which are effective to develop the oral skill of students about classroom practices in the following words. She said that *'teachers need to create environments for students where they get comfortable and confidence to involve in the activities.* With regarding this, she also explores the activities she implements in her classroom on improving students speaking proficiency. She said *adopting activities, strategies to make student motivate is a crucial.* She provides a topic to a class where students can relate their own experiences, to avoid their fear she used to appoint monitor turn wise to remind class to stick to the target language and had discussion later and outcomes of the activities are also positive. Previous research by Mendez and Marin (2007) from the University of Quintana Roo produced very good results when it came 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 on the other; effective teaching on speaking development is a debatable subject her perception of relevant strategies can address all kind of learning problem and speaking as well.

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's observed that children grasp concepts more thoroughly and perform better academically when they are directly involved and actively participating 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 opinion 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 subject to be taught. The gap between theoretical and practical learning are the crucial issues.

Conclusion

This paper highlights the indispensable role of teachers in enhancing English Language Teaching (ELT) learners speaking proficiency. Through the use of a qualitative methodology and the analysis of two seasoned English teachers, the study uncovers a variety of obstacles that students encounter when learning spoken language from an exposer and engaging teaching strategies to a weal vocabulary and concepts. The results highlight how important it is for teachers to establish flexible learning environments, provide a variety of learning opportunities and respond to students' challenges with understanding. The effectiveness of interactive, student- centered teaching strategies are highlighted in paper which also stress the critical need of closing the knowledge gap between theory and practice. My research participants consider, it is necessary to ensure that teachers' use appropriate strategies for oral language teaching and there was need to investigate the teaching strategies that enhance oral skills proficiency in English language for students and should implement some strategies.

The exploration of learning opportunities and the challenges students face in accessing them reveals the complex landscape of education. In the pursuit of comprehensive learning experiences and quality language learning, individuals encounter a variety of obstacles, including injustices in society to gender discrimination. Despite these difficulties, teachers are essential in creating inclusive learning environments that support students' development. Going further,

overcoming these challenges requires for a varied strategy. Teachers need to be activists for inclusive curriculum design, opportunities for professional growth, and policies that encourage the development of language competency. To create a supportive environment that promotes learning and growth, stakeholders including educators, policymakers, parents, and community members must collaborate together.

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