

Exploratory Action Research: Stories of Nepalese EFL Teachers



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Stories of Nepalese EFL Teachers



A. S. Hornby Educational Trust



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All the editors contributed equally to developing this volume.

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Foreword by Richard Smith

Since 2013 I've had the privilege and pleasure to visit Nepal quite often, twice as a speaker at the annual NELTA conference, and several times to facilitate workshops at the invitation of the British Council, including as coordinator of its Action Research Mentoring Scheme (ARMS) from 2017 onwards. Due to these visits, I've come to appreciate the dedication and professionalism of Nepalese English teachers, who – despite facing large classes with heavy workloads and few physical resources, especially in the public sector, often seem to devote long hours in the service of their pupils and in search of enhanced professional development. NELTA – the Nepal English Language Teachers' Association – is recognized internationally as one of the strongest organizations of its kind, and has branches across the country. I well remember the first time I visited Nepal and talked to a teacher who told me he had walked for several days in order to be at the association's national conference in Kathmandu. As I know from experience, the challenges of mentoring teachers at a distance should not be underestimated, either – connectivity is often an issue, and this is just one of the difficulties that those involved in the project reported on here have had to face and overcome.

They have overcome them, though, and great credit is due to the editors and all the authors. I have got to know Laxman-ji, Suman-ji and Sagun-ji quite well over the years – and have got to know how dedicated they are to teachers' professional development – as, since 2002, I have been a Trustee of the Hornby Trust, an educational charity which provides around ten scholarships per year to teachers of English from developing countries to study for a Master's in ELT / TESOL in the UK. Laxman was at Exeter University (Marjon) in 2000/2001, even before I became a Trustee in 2002; Suman was a Hornby Scholar at Lancaster University (2012/13) and Sagun came to Warwick, where I teach, in 2016/17. I think it was at that point that Sagun got to hear about Exploratory Action Research, an approach I'd been developing – and which is still being adopted successfully by teachers on the British Council Champion Teachers programme in Latin America (Chile at first, then Peru, Colombia and Mexico). The editors give a good overview of this approach in Section 1 of this book, so I won't go into the details of it here. Suffice it to say that 'EAR' was developed specifically to help teachers address (understand and overcome certain aspects of) the kind of relatively 'difficult' circumstances Nepali teachers are facing – as alluded to above – and which are shared by so many teachers in Latin America, Africa and South Asia, but which tend to be neglected in most published ELT advice and research.

I'm very happy that, in 2018, the three editors saw sufficient value in the kind of work Indian and Nepali teachers had been doing in ARMS to apply independently to the Hornby Trust to fund an innovative project designed by themselves, which is reported on in the pages of this book. I'm equally happy that the Hornby Trust has agreed to support publication of this book by NELTA via a small grant under its 'Decentring ELT' initiative. I congratulate the editors and all the authors for their dedication and hard work, and for their outstanding achievement! I'm sure many other teachers will derive inspiration from the stories shared here.

Richard Smith

University of Warwick / A.S. Hornby Educational Trust, UK

Remarks from the NELTA President

It is my immense pleasure to write a foreword for the book *Exploratory Action Research (EAR): Stories of Nepalese EFL Teachers*. NELTA feels privileged to publish it.

This volume comprises stories of exploratory action research carried out by the Nepalese teachers of English as a foreign language, with some empirical evidence that subtly suggests classroom strategies to deal with common problems in teaching English in the local context. The contributors are teachers from different parts of Nepal who enrolled in a year-long course designed by the editors. Therefore, the stories give some flavor of academic language.

This book begins with the project description along with the usage guidelines. The latter section can act as a rudder for teachers and teacher educators. The section ‘Introducing EAR and Teachers’ EAR Stories’ helps readers understand EAR, its steps and the issues that the teachers are required to explore. This section is also able to establish the theoretical bases of EAR.

This volume presents 15 EAR stories ranging from issues related to low participation of learners in speaking activities through improving reading comprehension through students’ reluctance in using English as a means of interaction in the classroom. Each contributor has set up a background, presented research questions, explained the methodology and findings and plans of actions and the outcomes. The contributors have revealed their insights on the techniques that they explore their classroom issues or problems and the strategies that they have devised. It gives a complete picture to address common issues in EFL classrooms. Simultaneously, their stories will also help other interested teachers to understand EAR and carry it out in their own settings.

Overall, this is a wonderful book, which values teachers’ work and proves that teachers can be researchers to explore the issues of their own contexts and tackle them with informed decisions. I am confident that this book will be a cornerstone of EAR practice in Nepal.

I truly appreciate Prof. Dr. Laxman Gnawali, Dr. Suman Laudari, and Mr. Sagun Shrestha, currently based in different regions, who collaborated to produce such a wonderful book. I am sure many teachers, teacher educators and academics will benefit from this.

Last but by no means least; NELTA would like to thank the Hornby Educational Trust, especially Trustee Dr. Richard Smith for the support to bring out this volume.

With best regards!



Motikala Subba Dewan

President

Nepal English Language Teachers’ Association (NELTA)

A Year-long Journey: Our Exploratory Action Research Project

Collaboration is the key to the success of this year-long project, be it a collaboration between three facilitators or with participants. At first, we three Hornby scholars, Laxman Gnawali, Suman Laudari and Sagun Shrestha from Nepal agreed to collaborate to apply for a small fund to run this exploratory action research (EAR) training. Fortunately, our proposal got accepted by the A.S. Hornby Educational Trust, UK, and we began our journey from January 2019. By the time we began our project, we three were in three different locations: Kathmandu, Sydney and Dublin. Working being in distributed locations is another adventure we had during the project.

At first, we created a digital flyer and shared it using the Facebook page of Nepal English Language Teachers' Association (NELTA) and our own Facebook accounts. We got overwhelming responses from the participants. We had announced 100 quotas and had thought of having 20 people as alternative participants. But our program got oversubscribed as interest was shown by over 120 participants. We had decided to adopt a first-come-first serve basis to have 100 participants.

We began this program with the first webinar on February 23 2019. In the first webinar, we introduced the concept of exploratory action research and shared what we will do down the line in this program. We also introduced some web tools such as Edmodo which we had decided to use to make participants discuss their issues and share their work. We used EzTalks for synchronous communication and email for asynchronous communication during the program. We had decided to conduct webinars last Saturday of every English month, and later we also became flexible with regard to these dates. Up to six synchronous communication, we used the format of the webinar that is, the participants could not speak but attend the sessions and interact with the facilitators using the chat options but later we adopted the meeting options; therefore, the participants could also speak to us as required when they were in a meeting. It turned out to be lively. It is worth noting that we also introduced Google doc to the participants to allow them to share their research issues and research questions so that all the participants could see each other's issues and research questions and comment on them as required. We also used Viber to communicate in a group. One of our colleagues, Professor Laxman Gnawali also would make a call to participants when there were some messages to be transferred to the participants in relation to the EAR project. We primarily used the Gmail we created for the EAR program to communicate with our participants. We also created our website, www.actionresearchnepal.com (currently accessible from www.actionresearchnepaldotcom.wordpress.com) to disseminate information to our participants during the project.

Despite the fact that a large number of participants had shown great interest in the program in the beginning, we could not retain all the participants till the end. At the end, we had 25 percent of the total participants who successfully completed the program. We count this as a success as we feel that we were highly ambitious in the beginning to have 100 participants to get engaged virtually for a year in the exploratory action research project. The participants were from different parts of Nepal ranging from far-western to eastern part of Nepal. It was indeed an exciting moment to work with these colleagues and help them explore their classroom problems or puzzles.

As regards the mentoring experience, we really learnt a lot from our colleagues as well both regarding online training and exploratory action research. The experience of mentoring is amazing as we had to plan for each

webinar, and provide feedback to and interact with the participants. In some months, we could not run our regular webinars and we remained passive due to our own busy schedule, yet we still managed to make our participants get engaged in the upcoming webinars and complete the project. Participants were at a different pace during the program which was also due to the activities at their workplaces. During the program, they had to identify the problem or puzzle they faced in their classrooms, explore their problems or puzzles, plan for action to address their problems or puzzles and implement the plans in their classrooms. To explore their problems or puzzles, they would do background reading, interview their learners and colleagues, ask their colleagues to observe their lessons, conduct surveys in their classrooms and make notes of their own teaching. These actions would give them insights to explore their puzzles or problems and design some plans for action, and later they would implement the plans and observe if there were any changes. Those participants who completed the project expressed their happiness at the end which also shows the usefulness of exploratory action research for teachers to solve their emerging issues in their classrooms. We, as mentors, have realized that it is extremely valuable for teachers to understand their situation and come up with their own context-sensitive strategies. Teachers are the experts of their own contexts, and the exploratory action research can help them to make informed decisions. No doubt, they need some help from resource persons as well, but such help should not be the direct suggestion which can make the teachers be technicians to fix their issues in classrooms.

At this point, we are very much happy that we could bring this book which is indeed a collection of EAR stories of our successful participants. We are sure that this book will be an equally useful guide for other teachers and mentors who would love to explore EAR and who would love to read the issues that exist in EFL classrooms in developing countries' context. Finally, we would like to thank Richard Smith, who planted the seeds of exploratory action research in Nepal and has nurtured it further. We believe that we would not have conducted this project had he not introduced this idea to one of us, Sagun Shrestha, in Nepal. Similarly, we would like to thank the Hornby Trust, UK, for the financial support to run this project and British Council who helped us to receive financial support from the Hornby Trust.

We always expect to get your comments and feedback on what we have done. If you have any, please drop them at actionresearchnepal@gmail.com.

Thanks a lot!

Laxman Gnawali, Suman Laudari and Sagun Shrestha

How to Use This Book

Background

We believe that this book has a special value as a collection of stories of Nepalese EFL teachers who carried out EAR in their classrooms. The stories of teachers in this volume discuss the common problems that teachers noticed in their classroom, the steps that they took to explore their issues, the strategies they designed based on the findings of the exploration to address them, the ways they implemented those strategies and the outcomes they observed upon the implementation of their plans. This also reveals how teachers can address their classroom problems with their own initiations by exploring their own situations. Rather than adopting experts' advice which may be contextually irrelevant on many occasions, teachers can carry out EAR to deal with their own classroom puzzles more confidently. This volume comprises the stories of the teachers from public, private, and charity-run schools. These stories represent both urban and rural contexts. We hope that this volume will be useful for both teachers and teacher educators /trainers who are working in the field of EFL.

For teacher educators/trainers

This book will help teacher educators in understanding how teachers explore their classroom problems, build rapport with their colleagues and students, develop plans, and implement them to bring positive changes in their classroom. The teacher educators will also be able to share these stories as cases to make trainee teachers understand how EAR can help to deal with their issues. It will also help them to learn the common problems that EFL teachers have in Nepalese classrooms in particular and classes of developing context in general. Teacher educators can get trainee teachers to think of the answers to certain questions posed by the teachers in this study. Next, the trainee teachers can interact with the text and understand EAR more clearly. In summary, the teacher educators can use this book to:

- be familiar with common classroom problems that Nepalese EFL teachers face;
- learn the strategies that Nepalese EFL teachers use to address the issues identified by them;
- use some of the stories as sample stories during teacher training programs; and
- use questions given in the book for interactions during the teacher training program

For teachers

Teachers can highly benefit from this book. Firstly, they will be able to find the strategies that the teachers in this volume have used to deal with the common problems that regularly emerge in their classrooms. They can use these strategies, which are devised after the careful exploration of each problem, to deal with their problems. Secondly, they can learn about EAR and how it can be carried out by reading different research conducted by the teacher participants. Since all the research stories are presented in plain language, interested teachers can learn the value of EAR and the way it is independently conducted. Above all, they can try out EAR in their classes. This will make them realize how their colleagues and students can be the support to deal with their classroom

situations. In a nutshell, they can use this book to:

- learn what is EAR and how it is conducted;
- understand how a rapport is built with a learner, student, and school administration to conduct an EAR;
- relate their own problems to those discussed in the reports;
- adapt/replicate the strategies the teachers have used to address the classroom issues; and
- value the expertise of local teachers.

By and large, we hope this volume will be particularly useful to teacher educators and teachers of developing countries like Nepal who are interested in EAR. However, the studies carried out by different participants and their findings presented in this book may be used by anyone in exploring and solving their EFL classroom problems.

Section 1

Introducing EAR and Teachers' EAR Stories

Introducing EAR and Teachers' EAR Stories

- Laxman Gnawali, Suman Laudari & Sagun Shrestha

Introducing EAR

EAR stands for 'Exploratory Action Research'. Whilst action research is an established tradition in educational practice, EAR was made popular by Smith (2015a) and Smith and Rebolledo (2018) to refer to teacher-led research. It is practice-based research and aimed at finding the most effective solutions to classroom issues (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Farrell (2016) lists several terms, for example, 'practitioner-research', 'teacher-research', 'integrated teacher research', 'action research', 'informal action research', 'collaborative action research', 'small research', 'exploratory practice', 'exploratory practice study', and 'exploratory action research', that are used to denote the research conducted by teachers. The authors have used EAR to refer to the research carried out by the teachers in this volume that aimed at exploring and resolving the classroom issues based on informed decisions. The purpose of such research is to improve classroom practices by exploring classroom issues in understanding the causes as well as devising and implementing intervention strategies to address them. Smith (2015a) argues

[EAR is] a gradualist approach developed to be useful for induction into teacher-research in difficult circumstances, whereby teachers are encouraged first of all to engage in research-based exploration of issues arising in their classrooms via means which do not interfere with their everyday teaching, rather than immediately plunging into action and attempted measurement of change. Only after a first exploratory research phase has been completed are teachers guided to consider trying to resolve emerging issues by implementing and evaluating new actions, which themselves are grounded in and justified by findings from the first, exploratory phase (p. 39).

EAR is a form of "research by teachers for teachers" (Smith, 2015a, p. 39) and is gradual and grounded in nature. It is gradual because the technicalities and elements of action research need not be teased out and finalised before commencing the research. It is grounded because the research is based on the teacher's experience and their classroom practice.

Nonetheless, EAR is a systematic inquiry. It contributes to enhancing professional knowledge by getting a better understanding of classroom issues, students and teaching/learning and by implementing plans for change. As contended by Smith and Rebolledo (2018), EAR "can be an effective way to address and cope with difficult circumstances. since it enables teachers to gain a better understanding of their classroom contexts and develop appropriate ways of teaching, without waiting for solutions from outside" (p. 4). Hinting on how practical EAR can be for teachers, Békés (2019) argues that the findings which come from teachers involved in EAR can be easily transferred vis-à-vis the findings of

SLA research.

Furthermore, by learning to reflect on practice, inside or outside a classroom, EAR can become an organic means for professional growth. This is because teachers learn by reflecting on actions in the classroom (Schön, 1983), and EAR provides the opportunity for teachers to reflect on their teaching (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018). From the reports included in this book, you can find evidence of teachers reflecting on their pedagogical practice while engaging in the action research.

Whilst teacher-led research is considered important, not many teachers engage in research let alone write reports because research is generally academised and is theoretical and abstract in nature. And, not all teachers bring the knowledge and skills required to carry out theoretically driven research, which involves a lot of reading and writing reports in an academic style. As can be seen in this volume, EAR, unlike academically and theoretically driven research, needs to be practically and contextually guided. Teachers can write their reports in a narrative style to inform their readers of their practice. We contend that such reports, which provide an accurate anecdote of teachers' situation and the actions they implement to bring out the desired change, can help other teachers with their classroom practice.

Steps of EAR

There are only a limited number of reports or publications around EAR which explain EAR and/or ways to carry it out (Negi, 2019; Smith, 2015a; Smith, 2015b; Smith & Rebolledo, 2018). According to Smith and Rebolledo (2018), an EAR project consists of several steps that can be categorised into two phases, exploration and action. During the exploration phase, teachers make planning for exploration and collect information to understand the issues. In other words, it consists of three main steps, 'plan to explore', 'explore' and 'analyse and reflect'. Following exploration, they devise activities that are implemented to achieve the anticipated changes. Simply put, this phase consists of four steps, 'plan (to change)', 'act', 'observe' and 'reflect'.

Whilst the first stage of action research only consists of exploration, it can be time consuming. Smith (2015a) suggests teachers spend enough time in exploration of the issues so that they get a comprehensive understanding of the problems. For example, as can be seen in the reports included in this book, teachers have assumptions about their classroom and learners. It is only when they collect information and spend time reading and reflecting on such information that they understand the source of the problem and realise that their assumptions were not correct. Therefore, the exploration stage is as important as the second phase of EAR.

The second phase of EAR can be similar to the first stage in that after implementing the intervening actions, teachers spend time assessing the impact of their activities. And, this process involves, as in the exploration stage, collection of information and analysis. What separates the exploration and the action stages is the amount of reflection that teachers do. Whilst the first stage may involve reflecting

on the practice, the reflection in the latter stage focuses on intervening activities and their impact on the classroom and student learning.

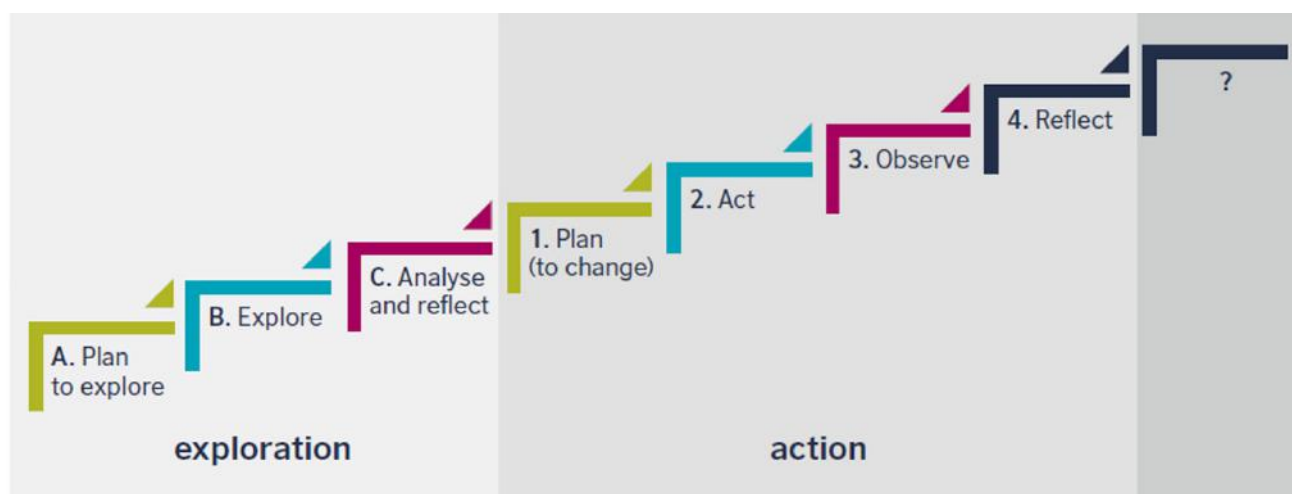


Figure 1. Steps of exploratory action research from Smith & Rebolledo (2018, p.25)

When the steps in these two stages are properly executed, it is likely that teachers are able to address their classroom issues. However, as you will see in one of the reports (See Manda's story, pp. 51-63), may not always be successful in bringing the desired changes due to several factors associated with the learners. Nonetheless, EAR is valuable because it does, as in (ibid), help teachers to understand their practice and their learners better. Therefore, even when EAR fails to result in desired changes, it still offers value to teachers.

Teachers' EAR Stories

It is very interesting to observe that the teachers whose stories have been presented here successfully carried out EAR while maintaining their own pace. Equally, they skillfully wrote their EAR stories for us to share them in this volume. In this section, we will give a synopsis of each story with the intention that this can help readers gain some ideas before they go through the stories.

In the first story, 'Low Participation of Learners in Speaking Activities', Bhesh Kumar Khadka highlights that he distributed questionnaires to his students to fill out and asked his colleague to observe the class during the exploratory phase. He carried out EAR at the primary level. He found out that his students did not take part in the speaking activities due to the lack of opportunities to use the target language inside and outside of classroom, lack of proper lesson planning, suitable teaching methods, and learning activities. He made some plans and implemented those plans, such as encouraging students to speak in English whenever possible, teaching vocabulary related to the speaking activities, giving them sufficient time to discuss and learn the vocabulary needed for the activities, using their mother tongue judiciously etc. After implementing his plans, he found out that the learners did not feel shy or frustrated when they were asked to speak in English. He added "They are much more motivated

to speak in the classroom. Most astonishing change is that they have started to speak in English among themselves and even with the teachers” (p. 14).

Debraj Karki, in the second story entitled ‘Improving the Reading Comprehension of Grade 10 Students’, explores the problems related to reading comprehension faced by tenth graders. To explore his problem, he interviewed secondary and lower secondary level English teachers, conducted an informal discussion with the students, and administered a questionnaire. Being guided by his exploration, he used two techniques, viz., using computer labs and jigsaw techniques to resolve the problem seen in his classroom. In the end, he observed that the class environment was more comfortable for students. consequently, the number of students’ participation in interaction increased. Both the teacher and the students could establish a good rapport. He also mentions that owing to a lack of English language ability, the majority of the students could not interact effectively despite having a comfortable environment for the interaction in the classroom. He asserts that he had to work more to make learners gain competence in using English and he thinks that he should employ more speaking activities in the future.

In the third story, Jeevan Bhattarai looks into his students’ lack of participation in his lessons. To answer if his students desired to interact with him and amongst each other, he conducted focus group discussions, distributed a questionnaire, and kept reflective notes. Through his exploration, he found out that his students withdrew their participation during his lessons due to the fear of punishment and mockery from their peers. Based on these findings, he decided on intervention activities to create a safe classroom environment and build confidence through different activities. For example, an activity he employed was delayed and no correctional technique was prescribed to encourage classroom interaction. After his intervention, he noticed an increase in classroom participation, and his rapport with his students was better. However, he felt that he needed to work on his students’ English language competencies so that they would feel more comfortable participating in the lessons.

In the fourth story ‘Why does Homework Cause Stress in Students?’, Jenny Rai states that to explore her issue, that is, students’ inability to submit homework, she used focused group discussion, questionnaire, and self-reflective notes to explore the issue. Based on her exploration, she made some plans, such as creating homework routines, changing the homework design, giving learners more group assignments instead of individual work, and increasing the deadline of the submission of the homework. She implemented some of her plans in her teaching and found that the homework submission rate was improved. She mentions how she could turn to become a helper or supporter for students from being a simple teacher to help students in resolving their homework issues.

In the next chapter, ‘Enhancing Speaking Skills of Higher Secondary Level Students’, Manda Pokharel shares that her students did not engage in any kind of activities during her lesson. To understand the reasons for her students’ reluctance to engage in any kind of activities, she used interviews, focus-group discussions, surveys and reflections. Upon data collection and analysis, she realised that her

students feared being mocked by their peers for speaking incorrect English. Some students were too shy to speak, others said that they lacked the confidence. However, they were still interested in learning English and wanted to use the language in the class. Based on the findings, she planned intervention activities. She tells in her story that she conducted lessons exclusively focusing on speaking skills. Her lessons included group and individual presentations on pre-allocated topics or topics of their interest. To motivate them to speak, she avoided correcting them when they made mistakes, and encouraged equal participation by creating mixed ability groups. Manda tells that after the intervention she had a better rapport with her students and some students started participating more in the classroom and their homework turnover was better. However, some students still struggled, and others memorised their presentations. She feels that the action research was an insightful journey as it made her change her behaviour and helped her understand her students better.

Parshu Ram Shrestha, in his story ‘Encouraging Students to Communicate in English’, explores students’ hesitation in communicating in English with each other. For this, he interviewed some students and took notes from informal talks with his students and colleagues. He found out that peer pressure, lack of English vocabulary and grammar, use of Nepali in classroom by teachers, the connecting language in Nepal, and their feeling that speaking in English was not compulsory in school made the learners hesitant in speaking English. He devised plans to provide maximum amount of time for English conversation through various activities such as pair/group discussing, role-playing, brainstorming, storytelling, interviewing, and completing a story, and reducing his speaking time in class. He implemented some of his plans and observed a few changes, such as his students started opening up more and asking him questions. They showed readiness to take part in classroom activities. Additionally, his students became friendly and supportive to him.

In the seventh chapter by Pema Bhusal, the research looks into her students’ lack of interest in creative writing because she felt that her students’ writing skills were under-developed as they did not write well. She used a survey to collect student opinions and also analysed students’ writing samples to find the problems. Through her exploration, she found out that her students were interested in improving their writing skills but lacked confidence. To address this issue, during the action stage, she employed some activities, such as teaching vocabulary, and task-related words as a pre-teach activity in her writing lessons, and doing brainstorming activities before the actual task. She noticed positive changes in their writing and their attitude towards their abilities to write. Furthermore, in her students’ feedback, they mentioned that they enjoyed the mind-mapping activities and group activities for writing. Pema believes that through her research, she was able to address the issues of creative writing in her lessons.

Next, Pushpa Raj Paudel in his research entitled ‘Students’ Reluctance in Using English as a Means of Interaction in the Classroom.’ used a questionnaire and informal group discussions with his students to find the reasons for their lack of interest in using English in the classroom. He says the main reasons his students did not speak in English were peer pressure, lack of appropriate opportunities and practice, and fear of making mistakes. To address these issues in the action phase, he changed his classroom strategy

by offering more time to practice the English language and introducing more interactive activities. An activity that he employed, for example, was group quizzes based on reading comprehension. He also used audio/video resources, such as songs to make them feel more confident in using English. After the intervention activities, he observed an increase in students' interest in using English in his class.

In the ninth chapter 'Enhancing Reading of Basic Level Students in English', Puskar Raj Bhatta begins by discussing how his students struggled to read. Through exploration, he concludes that while students liked reading, they had difficulties in vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension. During the intervention stage, Puskar taught his students phonics to improve their pronunciation, included pre-teach vocabulary in his lesson and engaged them in interactivities. After two weeks of intervention, Puskar examines the impact by collecting information through a survey, interview and requested his colleague to observe his lesson. The data suggests that after the intervention his students felt more comfortable than before in reading. Puskar concludes his story by deliberating into how action research helped him as a teacher.

Rima Karna, in the tenth chapter 'Involvement of All the Secondary Level Students in Free Writing Activities', reports that she started thinking seriously when she noticed that the quality of writing of her students was consistently poor. The answer sheets for one of the examinations gave a clear indication that something had to be done. This led her to the exploration of the problem about why secondary level students were not adequately able to answer free writing questions. She framed four exploratory questions and tried to find answers through journal writing, students' interviews and writing activities. She discovered that students enjoyed writing about their feelings and daily activities. Even when they struggled with the lack of words and used transliteration, they ended up writing. As a response to this finding, she made an action plan to change the situation. The 40-day intervention, which included journal writing, paragraph writing, story writing, and chart-description, showed that the students who did not have interest in writing activities started writing with the least hesitation. With this success, she concludes that care and systematic support can make a difference in students' learning.

Saloni Nhemafuki begins her story by introducing the challenges she faced in her students' creative writing class. She noticed that her students were not interested in creative writing and they limited themselves the basic exercises given in their book. She tried to force her students to write which did not work. She decided to explore the situation. Guided by the five exploratory questions, she talked to her students and wrote with them. She set word limits when she set the tasks. Upon observation, she realised that she was following a traditional approach to teaching writing and students needed a different perspective. Then, she implemented an action plan that included group division and discussion, inviting students to write their topics, writing with them, and defocusing grammar. Saloni reports that apart from the creative writing tasks the students did on Mondays, improved understanding of students, her confidence in tackling classroom issues, and a commitment to continue exploring and intervening developed.

The story of Sanjeev Kumar Singhal deals with an issue most teachers bring up in training sessions.

Working in a school with students coming from mixed communities, he noticed that students had a weak English language foundation and lacked confidence in speaking in English. Before jumping on to any action, he decided to explore the situation and framed his research questions focusing on his practices. For his exploration, he held informal discussions with students and had them complete a questionnaire, and the outcomes were shared with the headteacher and other teachers. The results showed that students needed support, and the use of group work and ICT would help them. As a response to the outcomes, he developed and implemented an action plan. He allowed more freedom to students, grouped them, engaged them in reading and speaking. ICT was more common as students were allowed to use their smartphones during the class. He reports positive outcomes which he attributes to the changed pedagogical practices and students treatment.

The thirteenth chapter ‘Why are my Students not Interested in Writing?’ by Shanti Sharma explores why her students are not interested in writing. To explore this issue, she used a survey and had her colleagues observe her lessons. When she analysed her data, she realised that her students were interested in writing, but they identified the lack of vocabulary as the main reason for their disengagement in the writing task. Therefore, during the action stage, she helped her students learn new words by employing different activities in her lessons. Moreover, she used mind-mapping activities before each writing task. She noticed that these activities improved her students’ writing skills and their level of engagement in the writing activities. After the intervention activities, she noticed that her students started completing their writing activities more regularly, including those who have low competencies in English language skills. She concludes that the research has been revealing in that it has helped her to understand her practice and her students better, and how she can address her classroom issues.

The next chapter by Suman Shrestha reports an EAR undertaking on reading. He had noticed that even though his students were struggling with all of the four language skills, reading challenged them the most. Of all the classes, his attention was drawn by Grade 4 because the students had started to learn different course subjects. To help his students improving their reading skill, he set forth the exploration with a list of guiding questions. The exploration was based on the close observation of the students with their reading ability. Furthermore, interviews with the students and their previous grade teacher showed reasons for the poor reading skills: inappropriate way of teaching, lack of exposure, lack of practice, and lack of confidence. To improve the situation, he changed the way he dealt with vocabulary using games and a teaching strategy, increased time for reading practice, and organised group activities for reading tasks. He finally saw positive results in students reading practices as well as the way he perceived teaching reading.

In the last story ‘Encouraging Students for Effective Learning’, Tarka Khatri starts by outlining a difficult situation he was facing in the class: his students were not effectively learning. The visible problem was that the students were irregular to school that led to ineffective learning. Once he noticed the problem, he explored the situation by carrying out interviews with students and parents and holding meeting the management committee members. The exploration showed that students missed classes

due to several reasons: household work, parentless situation, long distance to reach school, health problems, household work, labour work etc. Based on the findings, he held meetings to raise awareness of parents, grouped and paired students and changed his classroom practices. A reassessment showed some improvement in the situation, but the attendance was never full. He found that there were more problems than noticed before, so he made some strategic plans for further intervention. The study ended with the realization that school-parents cooperation makes a difference.

Conclusion

To sum up, EAR can be an effective means for teachers to understand their classroom problems or puzzles and devise context-sensitive strategies based on their exploration to address those identified problems or puzzles. EAR has two phases viz., exploration phase in which teachers explore their problems or puzzles using different instruments and/or approaches, such as interviews with their students and colleagues, surveys with their learners, self-reflective notes, observation of their classes by their colleagues, informal discussion with their students and colleagues, etc., and action phase in which teachers devise strategies based on the findings of their exploration and implement those strategies to address their problems or puzzles. The exploration phase includes three main steps, 'plan to explore', 'explore' and 'analyse and reflect' and the latter phase, the action phase includes four steps, 'plan (to change)', 'act', 'observe' and 'reflect'. The EAR stories that are presented here clearly explain how teachers who carried out EAR in their own contexts used different instruments and/ or means to understand their problems and how they designed plans and executed them to obtain the desired changes in their classrooms.

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Section 2

EAR

**Stories from
Teachers**

Low Participation of Learners in Speaking Activities

- Bhesh Kumar Khadka
(bheshraj29@gmail.com)

Pointers for pondering

Think about these questions before you proceed to the research story presented by Bhesh Kumar Khadka.

- How will you react if your students are not interested in English speaking activities?
- What techniques will you use to engage your learners in English speaking activities?

Introduction

I am Bhesh Kumar Khadka from Morang, Nepal. I have been teaching English to different levels (from bachelors to primary) of students for more than nine years. Currently, I am teaching English to young learners in Shree Laxmi secondary school in Morang, Nepal. My area of interest includes teacher training, materials designing, and conducting research.

Research issue

Low participation of students in speaking activities

Background

I am an English teacher of a government-funded school. I teach English in grade four. I decided to start this research because I had an issue with my classroom speaking activities. I felt that my speaking class was unsuccessful because my students did not adequately participate in the speaking activities. They always tried to avoid taking part in speaking activities. I realised that I needed to do something so that my students would actively and effectively engage in speaking activities. Then I started discussing this issue with my colleagues and asked them to share their teaching activities and experiences. Similarly, I started to read books related to English teaching methods and searched the internet to find out what exactly entails speaking activity and what can be done in the classroom. I asked my colleagues the following questions:

- a. What activities can be done in the speaking activities?
- b. How important is it to engage students in the speaking activities?
- c. What are the main difficulties you face in the speaking activities in your class?

Subsequently, I was invited to observe their classroom practices.

After interviewing my colleagues and observing their teaching methodology, I noticed that the student participation in the speaking activities was very crucial. Therefore, I decided to research on this topic. The objectives of conducting this research are as follows:

- a. To find possible causes of low participation of students in speaking activities
- b. To find suitable solutions to increase the participation of the students in speaking activity.

Research questions

1. Why is it that the students do not speak in English?
2. How much do I encourage my students to speak?
3. What opportunities are there for my students to speak English in school?

Methodology used at exploratory phase

I teach English at the primary level. English is often limited to EFL in Nepal, but it is taught from the primary level up to the Bachelor level as a compulsory subject. The federal Government of Nepal, along with the local government and parents give a lot of focus on the English language that we can find many government schools using English as a medium of instruction to teach all subjects from the primary level.

The syllabus of primary level English course is designed such that it gives focus on the development of all four language skills. Though the government has made English a compulsory subject, the level of English proficiency in Nepalese students hasn't improved much. Students can read and write with a certain degree of success, but they cannot speak fluently and accurately.

My students showed interest in reading and writing but when it came to speaking in English, most of them hesitated. They did not show any kind of interest in English communication activities. Most of the time, they remained silent or started speaking in their mother tongue. Therefore, I decided to explore the problem and find out the causes of the speaking issue with my students.

For the EAR, I made a questionnaire and asked my students to fill them out. I requested a colleague to volunteer. Secondly, I asked my colleague to observe my class and give me concrete feedback based on my teaching. Thirdly, I recorded the video of my classroom teaching and learning activities with the help of my mobile phone, and carefully reviewed it.

While doing my research, I got a lot of support from my institution. My headteacher encouraged me to take such an endeavour and permitted to conduct other research-related activities. Other colleagues helped me design the questionnaire, conduct the survey, and interpret the data. They watched my class and gave valuable suggestions. Similarly, I got support from the technical team of my school. They provided me with the materials used in the research, gave an access to a laptop, photocopier, and the internet throughout the exploration of my research questions.

Let's answer this question.

How did Bhesh explore explore when he noticed that his students were less involved in the speaking activities?

Findings

After the exploration of the problem, I came up with really fascinating findings. Here is a short description of what I have found.

Findings from questionnaire

S. No.	Questions	Findings
1	Why do you hesitate to speak in English?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not understand the meaning - 75% • Fear of making mistakes - 11% • Fear of being teased - 7% • Lack of confidence - 5% • Lacking knowledge - 2%
2	How do you feel when your teacher speaks in English?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confused - 66% • Frustrated - 31% • Motivated - 3%
3	How do you feel when you are speaking?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confused - 70% • Motivated - 10% • Fearful - 20%
4	How do you feel when your classmates speak?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivated - 85% • Confused - 15%
5	What English speaking activities do you like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role play - 90% • free speech - 10%

Table 1. Survey result of the exploratory stage

Findings from peer observation

“You tried your level best to involve your students in the speaking activities. But it seems that they lack motivation, and you are not using student centred methods to teach them. You should use suitable methods and include lots of activities”, one of my colleagues told me after observing my class. I came

to know that my students do not take part in the speaking activities because of the following reasons:

- opportunities to use the target language inside and outside of school
- lack of proper lesson planning
- lack of suitable teaching methods
- lack of activities

Findings from my own reflection

When I watched the recording of my teaching, I came to know that I did not provide them with clear instructions before I asked them to do the activities. I found that I did not encourage them to speak in English and I did not give any suitable examples related to the task or topic.

Plans for action

The findings of the exploration show that I need to do many things to change the condition of the students. I have made a tentative plan to do the following things to bring the change.

- 1) Preparing every lesson of speaking class with minute details of activities so that I can focus on the teaching
- 2) Using lots of relevant teaching materials
- 3) Giving clear cut instructions and using instruction checking questions (ICQs) and concept checking questions (CCQs)
- 4) Using different types of communicative games such as Hangman, Rock Paper Scissors Drill, etc.
- 5) Conducting “Speakers’ Corners” programme every week
- 6) Teaching a related vocabulary list before giving speaking activities
- 7) Using pair work, group work, and role-play techniques.

Let’s answer this question.

Do you think he will be able to implement all the plans that he has designed above at the implementation phase? Why or why not?

Implementation of the plan and outcomes

I started my lesson plan. I gave due focus on the participation of the students. I encouraged them to speak in English. The result was that they started speaking in English in their classroom. Slowly, I adopted my new teaching strategies. I started teaching vocabulary related to the speaking activities. I gave them sufficient time to discuss and learn the words needed for the activities. I used the mother tongue judiciously. Then I moved to the speaking activities. Some examples of the activities that I used in the classroom are as follows:

It was a birthday party activity. The whole class was involved. The main language element practiced was asking and answering when the birth dates were. The students practiced the language expressions, such as “When is your birthday?”, “It’s in January”, etc. The topic area of the activity was numbers and months.

I first taught them the essential vocabularies such as birthdays, numbers up to 32, months of the year, types of presents that they received during their birthdays (such as chocolates, books, etc.). After that, I gave each student a present and asked them to write their date of birth on a label. Then I collected those presents and redistributed them randomly so that each student would get a different present. This time they had to imagine what was inside the packaging and wrote that on the back of the card. After that, they stood up and went around the class asking, “When is your birthday?” until they found the person who had the right gift. Then they gave the present as they explained what was inside.

Another activity I used in the classroom was ‘Speaker’s Corner’. In this activity, students selected a topic and prepared a short speech. Then on Fridays, they gave a short presentation. Each week there was a different topic for the speech. This activity was really helpful for them in developing their speaking skill.

Let’s answer this question.

What activities did Bhesh use at the implementation phase?

After the action: Observation

“Your class is very much students oriented and effective. You have used effective activities and encouraged students to speak. The activities were effective and engaging. The language was also graded or used according to the level of the students. Now your students are motivated in your class,” one of my colleagues commented on my class after observation.

After implementing my new action plans, I found a very drastic change in my students. They did not feel shy or frustrated when they were asked to speak. They were much more motivated to speak in English. The most astonishing change is that they had started to speak in English among themselves as well as with the teachers. Slowly, they were gaining a better grasp in speaking. A survey after the activity showed the changes.

S.No.	Questions	Findings
1	Do you like to speak English?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes - 93% • No - 5% • No response - 2%

2	How do you feel at the time of speaking?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivated - 80 % • Easy - 15 % • Confident - 5 %
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Table 2. Survey result after the action

Lesson learned

What I found after my research was that the students hesitate to speak in English because of their shyness, lack of motivation, and difficulties in pronunciation and word meaning. These problems could be solved if we provided them with enough chance to learn and practice the language. Similarly, the students felt comfortable when we started our lesson with building a good rapport with the students. Asking questions on health, day, etc. could encourage them to take part in speaking activities. Similarly, a good lesson plan was necessary for effective and meaningful teaching. A good lesson plan, selection of suitable materials and effective activities, motivation in learners could bring positive changes in the teaching and learning activities.

Conclusion

I feel that the teaching profession is challenging. It demands dedication and hard work. Teachers face various problems during the teaching-learning period. But one can solve or minimize their problems by reflecting on their teaching activities. EAR is one of the most effective and cost-effective ways of addressing our classroom problems. Through EAR, I realise that the students do not learn because their teachers are not using proper methods and activities, and not necessarily due to the lack of knowledge with the students. Teachers may not be encouraging them during teaching and learning, and the teachers may not be providing them enough opportunities to express themselves.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Questionnaire administered during exploration

Name (Optional):

Class:

Section:...

Please read the questions carefully and tick (✓) or write the answers if you select the 'others' option.

1. Why do you hesitate to speak in English?	Mark (✓)
Do not understand the meaning.	
Fear of making mistakes.	
Fear of being teased.	
Lack of knowledge	
Lack of confidence	
Others (please specify)	

2. How do you feel when your teacher speaks in English?	Mark (✓)
Confused	
Frustrated	
Motivated	
Others (please specify)	

3. How do you feel when you are speaking?	Mark (✓)
Confused	
Motivated	
Fearful	
Others (please specify)	

4. How do you feel when your classmates speak?	Mark (✓)
Confused	
Motivated	
Others (please specify)	

5. What English speaking activities do you like?	Mark (✓)
Pair work	
Free speech	
Others (please specify)	

Appendix 2. Questionnaire administered after exploration

Name (Optional):

Class:.....

Section:.....

Please read the questions carefully and tick (✓) or write the answers if you select 'others' option.

1. Do you like to speak English?	Mark (✓)
Yes	
No	
Others (please specify.)	

2. How do you feel at the time of speaking?	Mark (✓)
Motivated	
Easy	
Difficult	
Others (please specify.)	

Improving the Reading Comprehension of Grade 10 Students

- Debraj Karki
(Karkidr2016@gmail.com)

Pointer for pondering

Think about the following question before you proceed to the research story presented by Debraj Karki.

What will you do if you encounter a situation in which your learners are having a hard time understanding a reading text?

Introduction

I am Debraj Karki, a secondary level English teacher at Yashodhara Buddha Secondary school, Lalitpur, Nepal. I teach English from Grade eight through ten. I am interested in researching different issues and challenges. It empowers me and my profession which brings me happiness.

Background

Most of my students come from low economic status and they do not have a proper educational environment. It is essential to teach them with due care. They are weak in many subjects; among them, English is one. Therefore, I have selected a research issue ‘improving reading comprehension of grade ten students.’

I carried out this research by garnering support from the school principal. I talked to her about the condition of students in my subject and their weak points. For example, students did not feel comfortable doing their exercises due to the lack of text comprehension. One-way teaching with lecture method did not support reading comprehension. They felt bored and passive in the class. So, it was essential to teach them reading skills coupled with different tasks such as Jigsaw activities and online reading text searches. Regarding the support from the school administration, it was prompt and encouraging. The school principal mentioned that I could use the school resources whenever I required them. She added that it is a good professional task which not only develops quality of my profession but also promotes the quality.

There were, no doubt, several other issues as well while teaching English. However, I selected this issue in a sense that reading has a higher weightage (40 marks) in the Secondary Education Examination (SEE) board exams than other skills of the language. If students developed their reading comprehension,

they would develop their linguistic competency.

I prepared the following research questions about the issue.

Research questions

What is reading comprehension?

What are the challenges associated with reading comprehension?

How can we overcome those challenges related to reading comprehension?

What kind of English text that the students hesitate to read?

Methodology used at exploratory phase and findings

Interview

I interviewed my colleagues about the issues on reading comprehension. The interview was taken with the secondary and lower secondary level English teachers. It was a semi-structured interview. My colleagues who teach at Namuna Machhindra, lagankhel, stated that reading comprehension at a community school was a serious problem. There were more than 60% of students who did not read the text. Even some student could not verbalize the text. In such situations, using audio-video materials, journals, as well as group and pair work discussion on reading text might enhance their reading comprehension. Similarly, another English teacher mentioned that traditional methods of teaching such as Grammar-Translation hindered reading comprehension. Most teachers in a community school taught English by translating text in a mother tongue and devoid them of English language exposure. They did not show seriousness whether students understood the text. Consequently, the students remained weak in reading comprehension.

Informal discussion

I had an informal discussion with students in their mother tongue inside and outside their classroom. Some girls stated that they loved reading English texts but could not understand them completely.

The students were of the opinion that the teachers should take them to the library for reading interesting storybooks and other journals. This activity could motivate them in reading and understanding. Likewise, they mentioned that teachers should involve them in different activities in the classroom based on their reading text. A boy, from grade 10, told me that he was very much interested in performing drama in English. For that, they could act in front of the classroom. But he felt shy due to the limited vocabulary he had in the English language. Such kind of constructive feedback encouraged me to continue my research.

Questionnaire

I also distributed questionnaires to collect data in grade ten. All the students were interested in reading. However, they chose stories over essays. Stories were interesting to them. But difficult words hindered them from reading. For that, teacher's guidance was essential. One of the girls added that if they got extra activities such as performing a drama or getting involved in a group work based on a text, it would be interesting. Such information helped to review my teaching activities in the classroom. The result of the student response in the questionnaire is presented below.

Data collection

	Questionnaire	Yes	No
1	Are you interested in reading?	100%	
2	My favourite reading text is essay	40%	60%
3	I enjoy reading stories and novels.	90%	10%
4	Difficult vocabularies discourage my study.	70%	30%
5	Teachers' guidance encourages my study.	100%	
6	I can read but do not understand the meaning	80%	20%
7	How do you feel while reading the text?		
	I do understand		
	I understand partially	70%	
	I do not understand		30%

Table 1. The result of the students' response

Let's answer this question.

How did Debraj explore the issue related to reading comprehension?

Plan for Intervention

Regarding my students' achievement in reading, it was not satisfactory. I always focused on explaining the text in simple terms and involving them to do the exercises. But I never thought of other alternative ways to improve their reading. When I got an opportunity to participate in EAR, I thought about my classroom issues and decided to work on it.

There were several activities to enhance reading comprehension in a classroom, such as

- a) Taking learners to a computer lab every Friday and reading some interesting storybooks.
- b) Jigsaw reading
- c) Predicting from words and pictures
- d) Comprehension exercises
- e) Language exercises
- f) Discussing the topic
- g) Debating, writing, and summarizing

It was really difficult to implement all these activities. Therefore, I used the first two activities in my classroom.

Taking students to the lab every Friday

In this activity, I listed a hundred interesting reading texts that could be accessed on the school computers. Those materials were available in the school's lab as we have got the support from Open Learning Exchange (OLE) Nepal. I chose storybooks based on the grade level of students. I asked them to read the stories and take notes. Then they had to present the text in the classroom. Initially, some students hesitated, many were excited. We started it this activity on December 15, 2019 and this continued till March 15.

They accessed their computer lab every Friday. They chose a text themselves and extracted the information from the text. My colleague, a science teacher, told me that students are interested in going to the computer lab and reading English texts. What I realised during this activity was that involving students in their interested activities enhanced their learning and academic achievement.



Figure 1. Students in a computer lab

Using Jigsaw techniques

Before this, I used to teach by explaining the text in simple English language. Some students would understand the text and answer the exercise questions but the students who needed help could not progress in reading. They showed the exercise by copying from others. So, I divided the students into different groups and switched the groups daily. I divided the text into different paragraphs and distributed them in groups and asked them to extract the information and write that on a piece of paper. Then they were asked to stick the paper on the board and discuss them in-depth. Finally, we all arranged the information in a systematic order. This technique helped all students to participate in a discussion on the topics. It became effective improving their reading comprehension. It motivated and engaged all students to do their activities in the classroom. They demonstrated their activities in front of the class. Similarly, if they had difficulty doing the activities, they could actively discuss with their group members and reached a conclusion. Jigsaw techniques became even more effective because all the students were involved in the task.

What I realised was that if students were collaboratively engaged in a task, they were ready to learn from the task. Hence, as far as possible, teachers should think of different or alternative ways in their classroom activities to address the classroom issues.

Let's answer this question.

What techniques did Debraj implement to improve the learners skills of comprehending the texts? How?

Conclusion

The techniques I used, such as taking students to the computer lab every Friday and using the jigsaw technique helped improve the reading comprehension of grade ten students. on Fridays, my students were excited and ready to go to their computer lab. They discussed with each other about their reading text. Similarly, they formed a group to participate in jigsaw activities themselves. active student participation made my teaching easier and comfortable. It encouraged me to think about my teaching techniques. Before that, I taught my subject ignoring the students' level of understanding. I never thought whether my students understood the text or not.

Appendix: Questionnaire used for collecting data

S. No.	Questionnaire	Yes	No
1	Are you interested in reading?		
2	My favourite reading text is essay		
3	I enjoy reading stories and novels.		
4	Difficult vocabularies discourage my study.		
5	Teachers' guidance encourages my study.		
6	I can read but do not understand the meaning		
7	How do you feel while reading the text? a) I do understand b) I understand partially c) I do not understand		

Lack of Participation in Classroom Interaction

- Jeevan Bhattarai
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Pointers for pondering

1. As an EFL teacher, what would you do if your students never participated during your lessons?
2. What factors do you think discourage students from participation in class activities?

Introduction

I am Jeevan Bhattarai. I have been teaching English at the basic and secondary levels for eight years. Currently, I am working at Janapremi Secondary School, a government-aided school in Udayapur District. The school runs classes from nursery to grade 12. The classes at the secondary level are large and heterogeneous in terms of student language competency, language, caste, and economic backgrounds. It is a Nepali medium school for the children from economically underprivileged families. Mostly, children of working-class families study in this school. I carried out this exploratory action research in grade nine.

Background

As it is a community school in the rural part of Udayapur district, students from low economic backgrounds study here. The medium of instruction is Nepali except that it is in English subject. The knowledge gap is acute among high and low performing students in terms of their exam results.

One of the urgent problems I faced in my class was that my students were passive and did not take part in the classroom activities. Out of 56 students, hardly 40 attended the class regularly.

I always wanted to make my class interactive. I wanted them to try asking and responding to my questions. Similarly, I wanted them to share their difficulties, strengths, and weaknesses about their learning. Before EAR, I usually asked them questions about the lesson I taught, their feelings on learning, difficulties they were facing, and the things they had learnt. To encourage interaction, I frequently told them about the importance of interaction with their teachers in classroom. I encouraged them to speak, criticised them for not responding to my questions, and smacked those who did not show any interest in learning or sat in the back row of the class and made noises.

However, when I initiated a discussion by asking them questions, the same group of students repeatedly responded. The majority of the students neither asked questions, nor tried to answer my questions.

Many of them would wait for their peers to respond and then they would repeat their answers without any understanding.

The issue was urgent for me because it had impeded the effective delivery of the lesson. Due to a lack of transparent and effective communication, I was not able to adjust my task and techniques to the students' level best. Similarly, students were not able to develop their aural-oral skills.

Research Questions

To find solutions to the problems that I identified above, I had to find the answers to the following research questions:

- Do my students desire to interact with their teacher?
- What do they say are the reasons for not interacting with teachers in the classroom?
- What do they say that I should do to make the classroom more interactive?

Exploration

I wanted to explore on what deterred the students of grade nine from speaking with their teacher and what strategies I should apply to make my class more interactive. The research instruments I used for the exploration were focused group discussion, questionnaire, and self-reflective notes. I wrote self-reflective notes based on my observation in my class. I did it right after I finished my classes for three days. Then I randomly selected three groups of students; each group containing five students with at least two girls for the focused group discussion. I wrote notes on students' responses. After that, I administered the questionnaire. I had written questions in English and Nepali so that everyone would understand the questions. The result of the first questionnaire was confusing and many respondents did not complete it. I was not satisfied with the result. I found that many students had copied others' responses. I felt that there were too many questions. So, I reframed the questionnaire and re-administered it. I included both closed and open-ended questions. The questionnaire consisted of three closed-ended and two open-ended questions. The first three closed-ended questions were used to find their responses on their desire and involvement in interaction. The two open-ended questions explored the reasons for not interacting and their expected behaviours from the teacher. Out of 56, only 34 students submitted the completed questionnaires.

The data obtained from the questionnaire is presented in the following table.

Questionnaire	Yes	%	No	%
1. Do you like to talk to your teacher in the classroom?	32	94	2	6
2. Do you ask and respond to the teacher's questions in the classroom?	13	38	21	62

3. Do you share your learning difficulties with your teacher?		16	47	18	53
4. If 'no' to one or all of the questions, what are the reasons for not interacting with the teacher in the classroom?	Responses	Freq.		%	
	I fear teachers.	15		44	
	When I try to speak, I am nervous.	5		15	
	When I stumble, friends laugh.	11		32	
	I cannot speak English.	8		24	
	I understand nothing.	10		29	
	I do not know the words' meaning.	6		18	
	I sometimes understand your question but cannot answer the question.	5		15	
5. What should your teacher do or what type of environment should he create to increase teacher-students interaction in the classroom?	Teacher should not be angry, criticize, punish and intimidate us.	15		44	
	Teacher should love and respect us.	5		15	
	Teacher should ask questions every day.	12		35	
	Teacher should make us understand in Nepali too.	12		35	
	Teacher should have fun in class	6		18	

Table 1. Survey result of the exploratory phase

Result of exploration

The result was deduced from the analysis of the data obtained from three instruments focus group discussion, survey, and reflective notes.

Focus group discussion. During the focused group discussion, very few students responded that they liked teachers asking them questions individually. The majority of them said they felt nervous, and fear ruled their head when the teacher called their names and asked them the questions individually. Some of them shared that they often wanted to avoid answering the questions. Most of the students lacked confidence in English. One of the students said,

"I know nothing in English, Neither I understand your questions nor do I know any answers. I read the

passage but don't understand, therefore, cannot read more than a paragraph". "I can tell my name in English nothing else".

Another student replied, "When I try to respond, my peers overtake me." "When I could answer correctly, I feel happy but when I could not, I feel very shy and sad".

After repeated requests, a girl responded, "I am always nervous because you (teacher) say this and that and make me public." "I know I have to speak but I cannot; what can I do?"

Survey questionnaire. After studying the students' responses to the questionnaire, I found that the majority of them (94%) wished to interact with their teacher, but they cannot do so due to various reasons, such as lack of confidence, nervousness, shyness, and afraid of making mistakes. They felt uncomfortable when the teacher-initiated a discussion. They did not take part or tried to take part in classroom discussion because of a lack of confidence in speaking in English, and due to their fear of the teacher's criticism. Another reason they mentioned was the fear of being a mockery in the classroom (32%).

(Note: Here the term 'interaction' is used as a cover term which includes sharing ideas in class, contributing to discussion, interacting with teacher, asking and responding to questions. (यहाँ अन्तरक्रिया (interaction) को अर्थ शिक्षक विद्यार्थी बीच हुने छलफल, प्रस्न-उत्तर, विचार अभिव्यक्त गर्ने, र आफ्ना सिकाइका समस्या शिक्षकलाई भन्ने आदि भन्ने हो)

Do you like to interact to your teacher in classroom? के तिमिलाई कक्षामा शिक्षकसंग अन्तरक्रिया गर्न मन पर्छ?

☒ yes ☐ no

Do you ask and respond teacher's questions in classroom? के तिमि कक्षामा शिक्षकसंग प्रस्न-उत्तर गर्छौ?

☐ yes ☒ no

Do you share your learning difficulties to your teacher? के तिमि कक्षामा शिक्षकलाई आफ्ना सिकाइका समस्या भन्छौ?

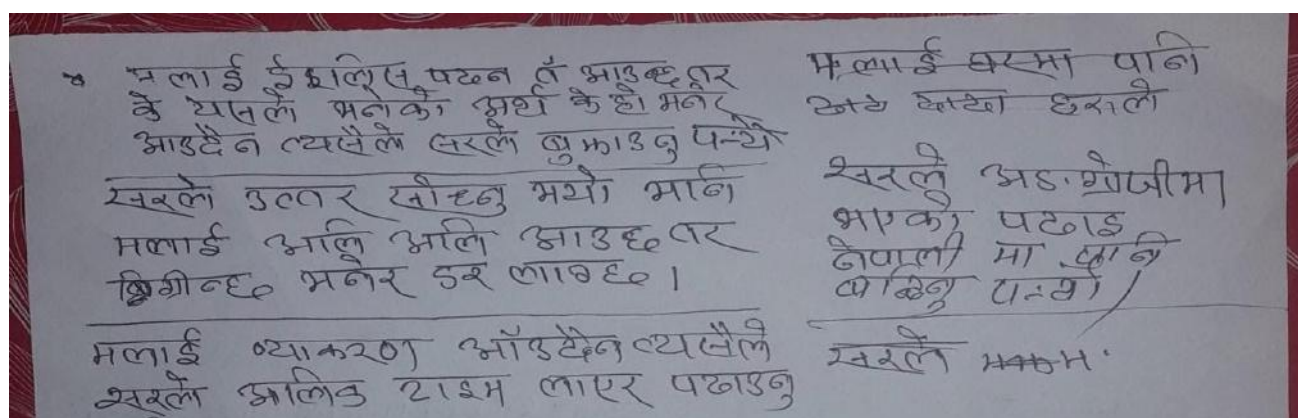
☐ yes ☒ no

If 'no' to one or all of the above question, what are the reasons for not interacting with teacher in classroom? यदी माथिका सबै वा कुनै एक प्रस्न को जवाफ होइन (no) छ भने तिमिले कक्षामा शिक्षकसंग अन्तरक्रिया गर्न नसक्ने कारण के हो?

Figure 1. A student's response to the survey questionnaire (both in English and Nepali)

To the question what the teacher should do to make the class interactive, a few of the respondents wrote "Teachers should not abuse and slap on cheeks." They also said that the teacher should make them understand in Nepali too. They suggested that the teacher should not be angry, criticize, punish, and intimidate them. A student wrote, "I fear with teacher." "I become nervous." "I know nothing, I feel shy among my friends." As they suggested, I should love and respect them. Moreover, they desired some fun activities in the class.

The exploration result made me realize that students did not attempt to speak because of the fear of punishment. Moreover, they were shy when their peers made negative comments on their responses.



Translation:

I know how to read in English, but I do not know the meaning of the given text; therefore, I urge you (his teacher) to explain the text.

I know the answers to some of the questions, but I cannot tell as I fear making mistakes.

I request you (his teacher) to spend time, especially on grammar while teaching for I am weak in Grammar.

I request you (his teacher) to explain the concepts in Nepali as well during teaching.

Figure 2. A student's response to the survey questionnaire and its English translation

Therefore, my corporal and verbal punishment, and peer-pressure reduced their confidence level which consequently stopped them from interacting in the classroom. Similarly, I found out that because of their lack of language competency they could not ask or answer questions and could not express their opinion to their teacher in the English language.

I realised that without developing language skill and maintaining good rapport, the problem would not be solved. Moreover, I felt the need to build up their self-esteem for them to speak up in the class.

Reflective notes. My observation notes revealed that I asked questions, asked for their opinions, doubts, and difficulties. I encouraged them and also, I forced them to contribute. When I asked them to stand up, their faces were cheerless. They preferred Nepali in the classroom because when I asked for their opinions to start a discussion, first in English and then in Nepali, few students responded and even asked me a few questions. Still, there were the majority who remained silent. On the contrary, when I used English, only a few responded. The majority of them had nothing to say.

It means along with language problems, there was something else that was causing them to remain

silent. My observation note of a lesson was:

I started class with greeting, asked what they studied yesterday, and asked one or two questions from the lesson I taught the day before. It was unit Five: 'A Debate' a reading comprehension passage. Yesterday I had dealt with difficult vocabulary, and today, they were to do exercises after reading the passage again. I asked them the meaning of few words. Three or four students told immediately, other four or five students looked on the copy at once and replied. Other few repeated the response of their peer. Other remained silent. I asked them to tell which words they remembered. I asked what they felt about the text after reading it first time. "Could you tell anything about the text?" On all the questions, majority of them remained quiet but often first benchers responded. I lost temper and told them that they never going to change. I told them they have eyes to see, heart to feel, mind to think and tongue to speak. Why don't they speak? However, time and again some were seen stealing time and talking with fellow seating nearby.

Studying observation notes I learned that I, myself, was one of the causes of this problem because I made negative criticism and frightened them. I concluded that my classroom behaviour planted the seed of fear in their heart and caused low self-esteem which eventually forced them to be silent.

Plan for action

To mitigate the problem, my first plan was to create a safe classroom environment and build confidence in them. I searched for some articles related to effective communication in the classroom on Internet and read them. Based on the results of the exploration and my reading on the issue, I planned for intervening actions. I planned to start the class greeting differently with a cheerful look for a few days. I planned to ask easy questions in English as well as in Nepali for a few days to encourage them to contribute. Most importantly, I prepared to control my temper and stopped making negative comments or punishing them when my students made mistakes. To minimize their anxiety, I collected plenty of jokes and riddles from the internet to use as ice-breakers. I considered the idea of providing time for quiet learners to respond. I also planned to consider my correction techniques.

I categorised these actions as confidence-building, supporting language and building rapport with my students as in the table below.

S.No.	Actions	Main Purpose
1.	Creating a safe learning environment in the classroom avoiding verbal and corporal punishment.	Confidence
2.	Asking easy questions at the beginning of class.	Confidence and language support
3.	Employing delayed and positive correction techniques	Confidence
4.	Making learning fun by using riddle, joke etc	Confidence and language
5.	Starting lessons with free discussion	Language

6.	Rewarding verbally those students who ask questions and put forward their opinions	Confidence
7.	Avoiding verbal and corporal punishment.	Confidence
8.	Learning names and calling them with first name	Rapport
9.	Talking to them about their life, family, feeling in private	Rapport
10.	Teaching to form questions and to answer wh-questions in English	Language

Table 2. Action plan

Action and outcomes

I reported the update to the headteacher when the exploration phase of the research was over. Upon receiving his approval, I started my action to intervene in the situation. I started with confidence-building actions. The first thing I did was I stopped verbal and corporal punishment. Similarly, I reconsidered my correction techniques and employed delayed and no correction techniques for a few days to encourage them to try speaking. When I corrected every error, they were demotivated. Every day, I started the lesson with free discussion on interesting topics, like Facebook, sports, films, fashions, and music. In the beginning, I allowed them to express their opinions in Nepali if they did not feel comfortable speaking in English. To make learning fun, I collected riddles and jokes from the internet and utilised them to grab their attention. Every time they contributed to the classroom interaction, I awarded them with praised to build confidence and to encourage them to communicate more.

Secondly, I employed rapport building activities because rapport building activities were helpful to reduce fear. I learned their names, called them with their first name with adjectives. For example, pretty Puspa, Jolly Jeet, and happy Hari. Moreover, I talked to them individually out of the classroom. I talked about their studies, family, and friends. We shared feelings, personal hobbies, likes and dislikes, and talked about favourite topics. I did all these activities to build our mutual and positive relationships with students so that they could feel comfortable sharing ideas in the classroom.

Thirdly, I taught them about questioning and answering techniques, and got them to practice every day during November.

The following table shows my actions during the intervening period.

S.No.	Actions	Main Purpose	Time
1.	Creating safe learning environment in the classroom avoiding verbal and corporal punishment.	Confidence	Nov-Dec
2.	Asking easy questions at the beginning of class.	Confidence and language support	Nov-Dec
3.	Employing delayed and positive correction techniques	Confidence	Nov-Dec
4.	Making learning fun by using riddle, joke etc	Confidence and language	Nov-Dec
5.	Starting lesson with free discussion	Language	Nov-Dec
6.	Rewarding verbally those students who ask questions and put forward their opinions	Confidence	Nov-Dec
7.	Avoiding verbal and corporal punishment.	Confidence	Nov-Dec
8.	Learning names and calling them with first name	Rapport	Nov
9.	Talking to them about their life, family, feeling in private	Rapport	Nov
10.	Teaching to form questions and to answer wh-questions in English	Language	Nov

Table 3. My actions during the intervening period

Throughout the process, I wrote reflective diaries to observe the changes caused by my action in the classroom. Reflection of a day was:

18 Nov. 2019 Second Period 11:50 am

I started the lesson by asking how they were feeling about my way of teaching. Some of them replied that I had been changed a lot. One of the students replied, "You were bad before but now a days you are good." I asked the reason but she did not reply. One boy seating on the third raw requested me to teach him how to speak English. Another seating by him added, "Write us many words and their meaning. We will learn by heart" Students' participation have been increasing however new problem came up. Some students showed no interest to talk to me but have begun to be rude and asked me awkward questions in Nepali. Whenever I turned to white board to write, painful noise rose from the back and came to the front within a while. The class has begun to be noisier. Today, I had to stop teaching and request back benchers to be silent four times. I felt they were not in mood of listening to me. Perhaps, I have to give them work to do instead of speaking from the front. Still, I should be satisfied that students felt safe to talk and began to try things out.

After critically studying the reflective diary, two types of changes were seen. The first change was in me and second in students. I changed from an authoritative teacher to a democratic one. Previously, I used to impose verbal and corporal punishment but now I do not. Some noticeable transformations were seen in students. The class-environment was more comfortable for students. Their fear of teachers decreased. They felt safe to interact in the classroom. Inclusion of riddle, and jokes made learning fun. The number of students' participation in interaction increased. Good rapport between teacher and students was established. However, due to a lack of English language ability, the majority of them could not interact effectively even if there was a conducive environment in the classroom. I have to work more on the language development of students. More speaking activities should be employed. Similarly, the Noise level of the class went up. on a few occasions, it was very difficult to calm them down.

Conclusion

My frequent attempts to make my class interactive had failed because of the two factors. The first one was the low confidence due to fear and the other was the lack of knowledge of the English language. My exercise of verbal and corporal punishment and peer pressure had caused fear in them which demotivated them to speak. Similarly, a low level of language competency blocked their tongue to utter anything in English. Implementation of no punishment policy and fun learning techniques helped a lot to reduce their anxiety. Likewise, overt teaching of questioning and answering in English and free discussion at the beginning of each lesson helped them to improve their English. I was successful in eradicating fear and creating a safe learning environment to a great extent. However, a lot of time and energy is still required to improve their level of English to be able to interact with the teacher in English in the classroom. On the other hand, increased confidence yielded overwhelming noise which was sometimes unmanageable. Now I have to seriously work to make that classroom-noise productive.

Being involved in EAR, I learned many things. I learned that we should step back and explore the situation if the way we are teaching is not working. I realised that we have to work smart instead of working hard.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaires

First Questionnaire

Grade:

Date:

1. Does your English teacher ask questions in your class? Yes No

If 'Yes', how often? sometimes frequently always

2. Do you answer his questions? Yes No

If 'Yes', how often? sometimes frequently always

3. Do you try to answer questions even if you are not sure of the answer? Yes No

4. If you do not try to answer teachers' questions, what are the reasons for that?

(You may tick more than one. Write if you have other reasons not given below)

i) I do not understand the questions at all. (ix)

ii) I don't know anything in English.

iii) I understand but do not know the answer. (x)

iv) I know the answer but cannot tell in English. (xi).....

v) because I feel nervous

vi) because I am often unsure of the answer

vii) because I am afraid of making mistakes.

5. Do you like your teacher asking you many questions? Yes No

If 'Yes' why? Please write reasons.

i) ii)

If 'No', why? Please write reasons

i) I don't know anything in English. ii)

6. Do you ask questions to your teacher in your class?

If 'Yes', how often? sometimes frequently

7. Why don't you ask questions many times?

- Because :
- i) I don't think it is necessary
 - ii) I never have a question to ask.
 - ii) I feel nervous when I try to ask.
 - iii) I am afraid of the teacher's criticism
 - iv) I feel embarrassed to be a centre of attention in class.
 - v)

8. Do you share your difficulties in learning English with your teacher? Yes No

If 'not' why don't you share your learning difficulties to your teacher?

- i) I don't like to study English. iv)
- ii) I know nothing in English. v)

7. What should your teacher do to increase teacher-students interaction?

- i).....ii)

Second questionnaire

(Note: Here the term 'interaction' is used as a cover term which includes sharing ideas in class, contributing to discussion, interacting with the teacher, asking and responding to questions.)

1. Do you like to talk to your teacher in the classroom? Yes No

2. Do you ask and respond to the teacher's questions in the classroom? Yes No

3. Do you share your learning difficulties with your teacher? Yes No

4. If 'no' to one or all of the above questions, what are the reasons for not interacting with the teacher in the classroom?

- i)..... ii)

5. What should your teacher do or what type of environment should he create to increase teacher-students interaction in the classroom?

- i)..... ii)

Appendix 2: Questions used in the focused group discussion.

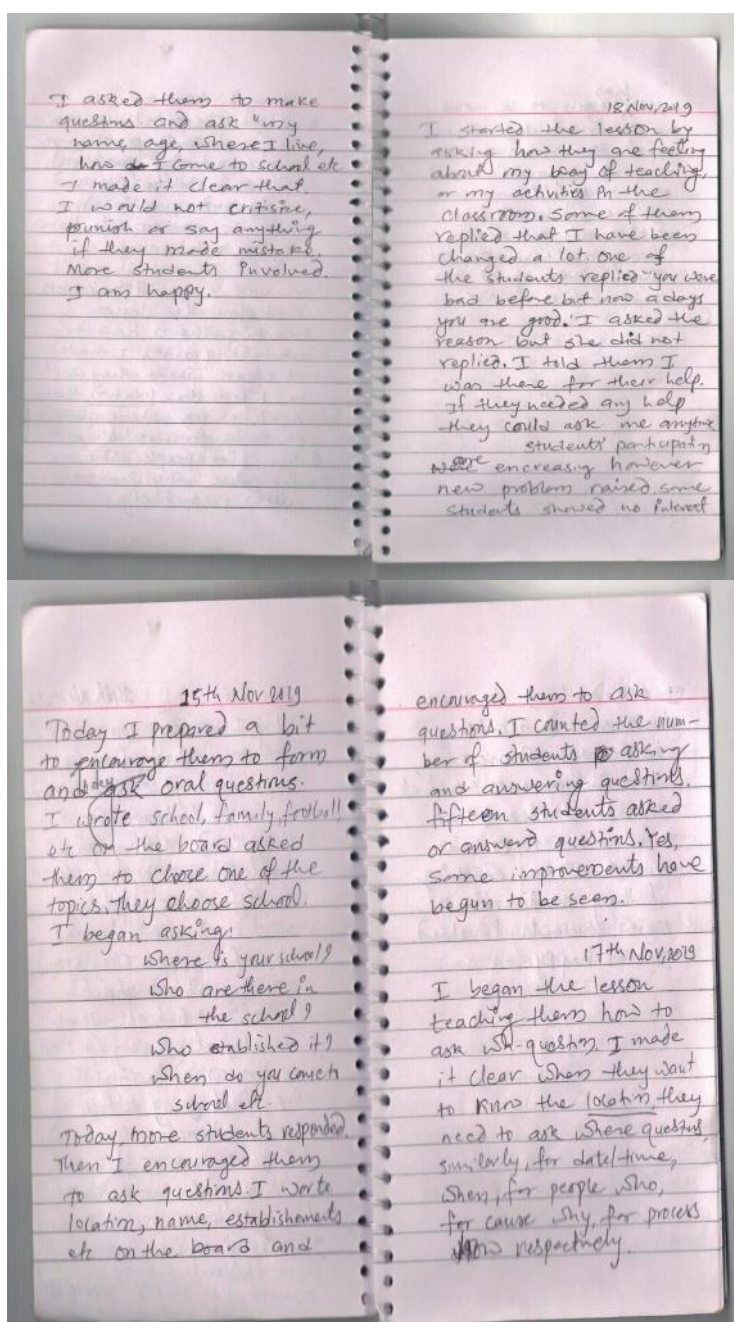
Do you take part in classroom discussion?

Do you wish to talk to your teacher?

Why don't you interact with your teacher?

What behaviours do you expect from your teacher?

Appendix 3: Sample reflective notes



Why does Homework Cause Stress in Students?

- Jenny Rai
(jraijen@gmail.com)

Pointer for pondering

Think about these question before you proceed to the research story presented by Jenny Rai.

- What will you normally do if you encounter the situation in which your learners are not submitting homework on time?

Introduction

I am Jenny Rai. I have been teaching English at basic and secondary levels for twelve years. Currently, I am working at Newton's Education Secondary School, a private school in Jhapa District. The school runs classes from nursery to grade 12. It's an English medium school. I carried out this exploratory action research (EAR) in grade nine.

Background

Generally, giving a homework assignment after each lesson is like a classroom routine for every teacher. Homework is generally given to students to ensure that they take time to review and remember the lessons. It can help improve a learner's general performance and enhance traits like self-discipline and independent problem-solving. But I think that a teacher may be giving an excessive amount of homework to students which may cause stress on them.

I might be wrong as well, hence I wanted to find out what exactly homework was doing to my students. Was homework making them self-disciplined individuals and independent problem solvers, or was it making them stressed out?

I thought about students and homework situation a lot and came to realise that something was making the homework submission number never reach 100 percent. It made me sad to see the frowning faces of students when I gave them homework. So, I wanted to see what exactly students thought about homework.

I found the following when I explored on the importance of homework (see Table 1). After reading it, I wanted to explore more on this topic and find out what was making them not do their homework assignments and if that was causing them stress.

If you still have doubts about whether to complete your assignments, check these reasons for doing homework (Why is Homework Important, n.d.):

1. Shows you what your teachers think is essential to learn and gives you a good idea of what to expect from future tests;
2. Offers a good opportunity to connect siblings, classmates, and parents with your education and get important support from them;
3. Is a huge part of your grades (if you fail to do your homework well, it will cost you a lot);
4. Teaches you accountability and responsibility when learning different subject matters;
5. Teaches you effective time management and how to prioritize all of your tasks;
6. Helps you learn how to get rid of procrastination because of assigned deadlines;
7. Helps you improve your self-esteem and identify existing issues before they get out of your control;
8. Reinforces concepts because the more you practice, the more likely you are to learn them.

(EDU STORM Ltd, 2019)

Table 1. Importance of homework

Research Questions

To find solutions to the problems that I identified above, I had to find the answers to the following research questions:

- How do my students feel about homework?
- How much time do they spend to complete their homework?
- Why does my student find homework?
- How are my colleagues assigning homework to students?
- Does homework put stress on students?

Exploration

I wanted to find out why the students are not being able to submit their course homework. Before I started with the EAR, I thought that it might be because they did not like a particular subject. I used many techniques to encourage them to do the homework assignment for my class. I helped them with all I could. Sometimes I reduced the amount of homework. Some days I gave the option to choose between topics for homework. Still, the homework submission was not improving significantly. It kept fluctuating.

The issue was urgent for me because incomplete homework meant a lot of my time would be wasted. I wanted to save my classroom teaching time. I was tired of the excuses students gave me every time. Talking about missed homework meant lots of stress generated in the classroom among teachers and learners.

I wanted to explore what deterred the students of grade nine from submitting all their homework. I thought for strategies I should apply to make my class submit all homework on time. The research instruments I used for exploration were focused group discussion, questionnaire, and self-reflective notes. I wrote self-reflective notes based on my observation of my class. I did it right after I finished my classes every day after I collected the homework.

I set out my plans to see whether I was just imagining about above questions or they were problems. Then I talked to my colleagues about my research questions.

Then I found out that they did have some kind of homework stress. Stress wasn't helping them complete their work on time. Then I designed some questions in Google form to conduct a survey and I emailed my students in one of the sections of grade 9. This section had 30 students. I collected 22 forms and was able to come up with my students' views about homework.

Let's answer this question.

How did Jenny explore when she identified that the learners in her class were not submitting homework as expected?

The data obtained from the questionnaire is presented in the following table.

S. N.	Questions	Percentage of students who responded
1	What do you think about homework?	
	a. It's useful for me	22.7 %
	b. It's very exciting for me	22.7 %
	c. It's useful but it is often difficult to complete	40.9 %
	d. It's useful for me but it consumes a lot of time	9.1 %

	e. It's useful but is tiresome for me	4.6 %
2.	How much time do you spend on your homework?	
	a. 1-2 hours	40.9 %
	b. 2-3 hours	22.7 %
	c. Less than one hour	27.3 %
	d. More than 3 hours	9.1 %
3.	How many subject homework assignments do you get every day?	
	a. 1-2	27.3 %
	b. 3-4	22.7 %
	c. 4-5	31.8 %
	d. More than 5	18.2 %
4.	Do you get any help to complete your homework?	
	a. No one	63.6 %
	b. My tuition teacher	4.5 %
	c. My subject teachers	18.2 %
	d. My friends	13.6 %
	e. My siblings	4.5 %
	f. My parents	4.5 %

5.	Do you feel stressed out due to homework?	
	a. Yes	40.9 %
	b. No	31.8 %
	c. Maybe	27.3 %
6.	If yes, why do you feel stressed? Some responses from students	
	a. Because it consumes a lot of time. b. Sometimes it's hard to do. c. Continuous concentration for several hours is a tedious task. d. Boring. e. I don't get free time after doing homework, which is sad. f. Due to some difficult questions. g. It's boring. h. It takes a lot of time, no time for mobile, TV and outdoor activities.	

Table 1. Survey result of the exploratory stage

Result of exploration

The result was deduced from the analysis of the data obtained from three instruments focus group discussion, survey, and reflective notes.

Focus group discussion

I had a focus group discussion with the students and my colleagues. I talked to my colleagues and found that they don't think about other subjects when giving homework to students. Almost every day, they gave homework to students. So, I think we were not paying attention to the number of homework we assigned to our students. Students knew homework numbers were high but had never talked to teachers about it. They only spoke among themselves and sometimes thought of new excuses when they could not submit their homework.

Survey

After studying the students' responses to the questionnaire, I found that the majority of students, 54.6%, think that homework assignments are exciting but tiresome, consumes a lot of time, and sometimes difficult to complete. Only 22.7% of the students thought it was useful and the last 22.7% of the students thought it was very exciting to do homework. 40.9% of the students spent 1-2 hours, 22.7% of the students spent 2-3 hours, 27.3% of the students spent less than 1 hour, 9.1% of the students spent 3 hours doing homework. The Students needed to do their homework on their own or with the help of someone at their home. 63.6% of the students did their homework without getting help from anyone whereas 4.5% of them got help from their tuition teachers. Their friend were helpful to 13.6% of the students. Siblings were helping 4.5% of them. 4.5% of the students got help from their parents in doing their homework. When finally asked if they were stressed out due to homework, 40.9% of them agreed that they were stressed out whereas 27.3 of the students stated that they were not sure. And only 31.8% said they were not stressed out due to homework.

When they were asked why they feel stressed out, some of their responses are as follows:

- a. Because it consumes a lot of time
- b. Sometimes, it's hard to do
- c. Continuous concentration for several hours is a tedious task
- d. Boring
- e. I don't get free time after doing homework, which is sad
- f. Due to some difficult questions
- g. It's boring
- h. It takes a lot of time, no time for mobile, TV and outdoors

Reflective Notes

My observation notes revealed that the students did not have a lot of free time. The students felt that they had no time to do other activities that they want to do. Many teachers would agree with a statement made by one of the teachers I interviewed who said, "Students have a lot of time at home and they should do something." But in earlier research, Hinchey (1996) reported that high school students repeatedly said that they do not have free time as teachers assumed. It made me realize that students do not like to spend much time doing homework as teachers expect them to. They would love to have some social life after school and spend some leisure time at home after quickly completing their homework.

My observation notes. Every teacher needs to be thoughtful about assigning homework to the students. We should be thoughtful of the total time that our students require to complete their assignment work. It seemed obvious that we ignore such facts. Every subject teacher only thinks about their subject and

end up burdening the students with loads of homework. We should be careful about our regular habits of assigning homework to our students as it may do more harm to the mental level of students than benefit them. Eren and Henderson (2011) in their research in the United States found that additional homework in science, history, and English had little to no impact on the test scores. And whether or not the homework I asked my student to do is helping them is a really difficult thing to answer.

Let's answer this question.

As per Jenny's findings, how do students feel about homework given by their teachers?

Plan for Action

To mitigate the problem of student's late submission of homework I came up with the following plans:

S. No.	Actions	Main Purpose
1.	Take a survey on what type of homework are fun for the students.	to make a plan to modify homework type
2.	Creating homework routine	to decrease the number of homework
3.	Changing the design of homework, from individual to group home assignments	to increase the interest of students on homework and decrease stress in students regarding homework.
4.	Increase deadline of homework	to increase the homework submission rate.

Table 2. Action and purpose

Action and outcomes

I took the survey for the students on what type of homework they want teachers to give.

1	What type of homework are fun?	Students responses in percentage
	a. Group Homework	31.8
	b. Reading	18.2
	c. Project work	22.7

	d. Memorizing	4.5
	e. Writing	22.7

Table 3. Students response on what type of Homeworks are fun to do

Secondly, I asked the students how many subject homework per day they want to have?

2	How many subject homework do you want in a day?	Students
	a. 1	15.8 %
	b. 2	21.1 %
	c. 3	47.4 %
	d. 4	5.3 %
	e. 5	10.5 %

Table 4. Students responses on how many subjects Homeworks do they want in a day

I reported the updates to the school academic coordinator when the exploration phase of the research was over. Upon receiving his approval, I started my action to intervene in the situation. I started with changing the homework giving practice. Similarly, I reconsidered giving my students more time to complete homework and encouraged them to complete their homework with their interest. Every time, I assigned homework to my students I allowed them to choose a group or partner for the homework. I gave an option in choosing the types of homework. For example, one group could make a presentation on a given topic, another group could make a PowerPoint presentation on the same, or maybe write an essay on the same topic. The results were remarkable. The homework submission rate improved.

The following table shows my actions during the intervention period.

S.No.	Actions	Main Purpose	Time
1.	Group homework (group of 3-4)	to let them work in a team	Nov

2.	Pair work	to be able to complete the work with each other help.	Dec
3.	Allowed them to choose topic of homework type	to make them feel they have control over the assignments and can choose	Nov-Dec
4.	Allowed some additional deadlines for submission of homework	to encourage students to submit homework	Nov-Dec
5.	Helping students to solve problems with the help of emails or phone calls or messages via messengers.	to ease the difficulty in completion of homework	Nov-Dec

Table 5. Actions during intervention period

Throughout the process, I wrote reflective diaries to observe the changes caused by my action in the classroom.

After critically studying the reflective diary, two types of changes were seen. The first change was in me and second in students. I changed from just simple teacher to helper or supporter of students in solving their homework problems like helping them every day with their lessons in classwork.

Some noticeable transformations were seen in the students. The number of homework submissions increased. Students seemed happier and became more cooperative.

Let's answer this question.

What did Jenny do to mitigate the problem of less submission of homework in her classroom?

Conclusion

I could have done this research in a better way if I had known the process in more detail during the time of framing the research questions or during the time of interviewing students or discussing with my colleagues. But with many trials and errors, I was able to come to a conclusion of my research that homework stressed out my students. I learned that we should step back and explore the situation if the

way we do things is not working in our classroom. Homework is important; hence we should help the students do it without any failure.

We can give homework to our students based on various goals about the subject matter, our personal preferences, and with confidence that our homework to the students will not hamper students' academic achievements. Similarly, it does not harm considering and improvising the ways we assign homework to our students and hear our students' voices regarding the type and amount of homework they like to receive. Our students need to be able to independently complete their homework at home. The homework should not overburden our students after school. Similarly, homework should not lay any stress on students nor keep them fully occupied that they have to compromise their time for extra-curricular or fun activities.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: First Questionnaire

Grade:

Date:

1. What is your name?

i. **What do you think about homework?**

- a. It's very exciting for me
- b. It's useful for me
- c. It's useful for me but it consumes a lot of time
- d. It's useful but is tiresome for me
- e. It's useful but it is often difficult to complete

j. **How much time do you spend on your homework?**

- a. Less than 1 hour
- b. 1-2 hours
- c. 2-3 hours
- d. more than 3 hours

1. **Do you get any help to complete your homework?**

- a. No one
- b. My tuition teacher
- c. My brother/sister
- d. My parents
- e. My subject teachers

2. **What type of homework are fun?**

- a. Reading
- b. Writing
- c. Memorizing
- d. Project work
- e. Group Homework

k. **How many subjects' home works do you get every day?**

- a. 1-2
- b. 3-4
- c. 4-5
- d. more than 5

Appendix 2: Questions used in the focused group discussion

Do you worry due to homework? Do you wish to talk to your teacher?

Why don't you ever talk to teachers when homework is difficult?

Why don't you ever talk to your teachers when the homework is too much?

Appendix 3: Sample Google survey responses

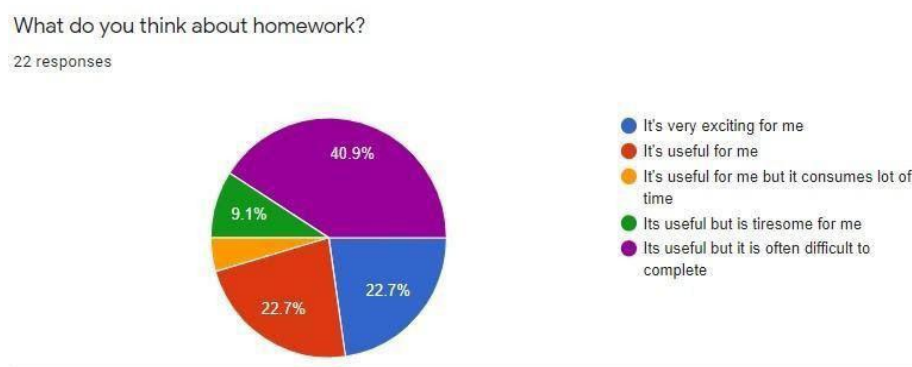


Figure 1. Students' perception of homework

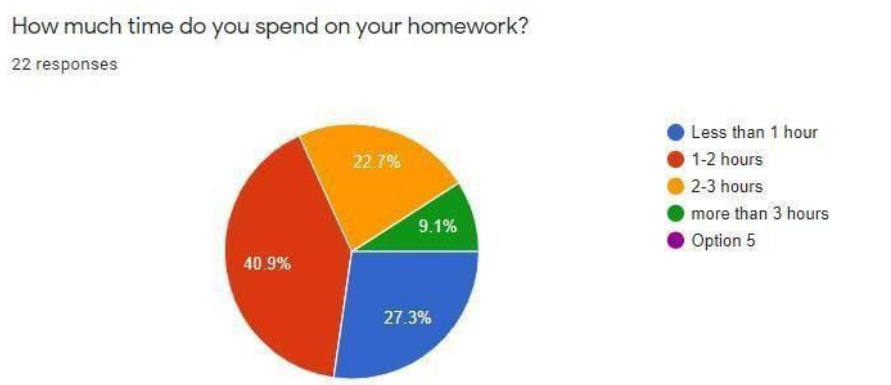


Figure 2. The amount of time students spend doing their homework

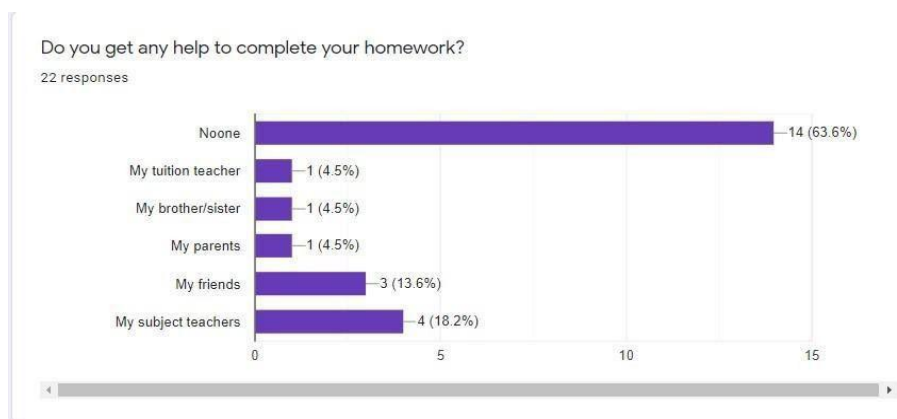


Figure 3. Students' responses related to the help they get while doing their homework

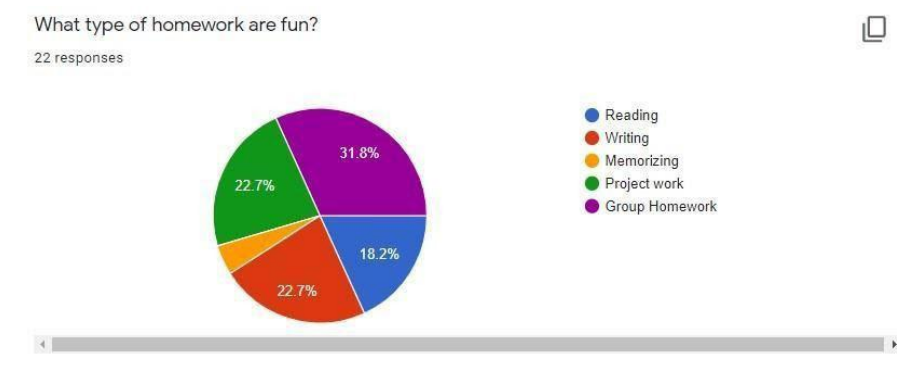


Figure 4. Students responses related to the type of homework which they consider are fun to do



Figure 5. Students responses for feeling stressed while doing homework

Enhancing Speaking Skill of Higher Secondary Level Students

- Manda Pokharel

(manda.pokharel@gmail.com)

Pointer for pondering

Think about the following question before you proceed to the research story presented by Manda.

What would you do if your students did not interact in the class and withdrew their engagement from the lesson?

Introduction

I am Manda Pokharel, a resident of Bhaktapur, Nepal. It's been one and a half decade that I have been teaching English. I began my teaching journey as a pre-primary level teacher. Currently, I am teaching as a secondary level (+2) teacher at Neel Barahi Secondary School at Kalimati for the last five years. It's a secondary-level public school that predominantly has students from low economic backgrounds. Furthermore, there is a richness in cultural diversity with many students coming from different regional areas.

Research issue

Why do my students hesitate to interact in English in my classroom?

Background

Students enrolled in the higher secondary level at my school have diverse backgrounds in terms of their geography, culture, religion, caste, ethnicity, and economic condition. Most of my students are originally from outside Kathmandu valley and they currently live in a rented accommodation and bear economic hardship from young age. As a result, many of them have a day job, and they cannot give time to their studies.

Additionally, they have a very low level of English language competency. They prefer classes in Nepali. While some of them want classes in English, they need their teachers to translate in Nepali for comprehension. As an English language teacher, I have made attempts to improve their language skills, but I have not been able to achieve the desired result.

To encourage my students to interact in class, I tried to involve them in different group activities. For example, I started by dividing the class into four to five students in a group, and giving each group a

paragraph to read and some questions to discuss. I then asked them to nominate a member from their group to describe the assigned paragraph or the answer the questions after discussion. Likewise, in grammar exercises, I asked them to work in pairs and groups. However, to my dismay, my students usually did not respond in the class. When asked to discuss in groups, they did not talk. Only a few of them discussed with one another. They seemed more comfortable working individually rather than in a group. They hesitated to share and speak. At times, the students did not speak in the class and that made me uncomfortable.

When I asked them the reasons for not speaking during the class, they replied that they did not understand the topic or they could not speak English. Every time, it was only a few students who spoke in the class.

Normally, I am perceived as a strict teacher. This is because I want them to be disciplined. It can be said that My students are scared of me. And, when my students do not speak, instead of motivating them, I would scold them.

Furthermore, most of my students already work to support their families. Most of them live away from their family members and far away from their villages. They study in the morning and work during the day. They work long hours, and they arrive home late. Additionally, English is the most difficult subject for them. They don't get time to study. I believe that this contributed to their lack of interest in speaking in English in my class.

My research is entirely devoted to enhancing the speaking skill of my students and making them participate in classroom discussions.

Before we go further, we would like you to consider the following questions.

What made Manda realise that her students were reluctant to participate and interact in her class?

What activities did Manda try in her lesson to encourage her students to interact?

Why do you think Manda's strategies failed to gain the desired outcomes?

Research questions

- a) Why is it that my students do not speak in English?? Don't they like speaking in English?
- b) What is not allowing my students to speak in English or participate in the English speaking class? Why are they not speaking?
- c) What is their prior experience in speaking English? How comfortable are they with speaking in English?
- d) How can I encourage my students to speak or promote their speaking habits and promote speaking skills to make the classroom participatory and interactive?
- e) What actions and activities do I need to use to make my students speak in English?

Exploration

I used interviews, focus-group discussions, surveys, and reflections to explore the factors that hindered my students from interacting during the lesson. I shared and discussed my intention in carrying out the action research with the students and asked if they had any questions or concerns. I did that to make them mentally prepared for their roles and to encourage them to help me and to see how they would react to the plan.

To understand my students' perspectives on class interaction, I conducted four focus group discussions with them right after the holiday. I did one-to-one interviews because some of my students did not speak in the group setting. And, a few of them talked to me during the break.

I ran a survey by giving them a few questions to answer. The questions were attached in the appendix. I reflected upon my past classes and students from the previous years and. I found out that discussions and presentations did not work in groups. Talking about the collaboration and help from teacher colleagues, I am the only Plus-two level full-time teacher in the school. Therefore, I could not seek any help from other teachers.

Findings

The discussion was framed into a checklist (see Appendix). It showed that their fear of speaking was the number one contributing factor hindering their interaction in the class. They were scared that they would be mocked when they made mistakes, and they are made fun of even after the class.

Similarly, most students mentioned that they felt shy, not confident, and scared of speaking. They also admitted that they were never used to speaking in English in the classroom setting before

I found out that most of the students could not construct simple sentences while talking about themselves or their surroundings. They lacked basic vocabulary and knowledge of English grammar to communicate successfully.

Time management was a real problem for the students, whether it was talking to me or for the study. The interview or discussion was struggling. Nevertheless, students were actively participating when their issues were addressed. They spoke in Nepali in discussion and interaction. They showed positive responses to the plan and research motive.

As many of the students didn't live with their parents, they were self-responsible for their learning and earning. As a result, they were having difficulties with their studies, especially with the English language. I observed that financial crises, lack of guardianship, weak educational background, and exposure to different environments were some of the responsible factors.

There were different concerns from the students.

'We want to learn, but we don't have basic knowledge of English' one of the students said. *'Though we want to do something, we can't give time ma'am'* the other said. *'By the time we reach home, it's late and we have other homework to do; we are tired. Yes, we cannot make such excuses being the students, we know'*, the other participant said.

As teachers, we counselled about the importance of time management with the students. Though they were busy, they had to give time during the night. *'Yes, ma'am it's our mistake as we are becoming lazy'. If we try we can'* one of the participants said, to which most of the students agreed. *'We understand the topic most of the time, but cannot say it in English'* a participant among a group said.

'If we make some mistakes in the class, friends make a mockery of it even after the class. This stops us from giving a try' a student said, and the others agreed.

In response to why they were absent so frequently, a participant said, *'we have some work, or we go to the village sometimes. But sometimes we feel too lazy to wake up'*, to which others agreed. Moreover, talking informally with the students about their lifestyle and family showed that the responsibilities of their siblings, household work, and of their workplaces kept them frequently away from the school.

I also talked with another English teacher and she mentioned that the students did not have any exposure to the English language as they had always been taught in the Nepali Medium of Instruction. Maybe because of that they were not competent in the English language and thus lack the basic knowledge of grammar to communicate in English.

From analysing the survey results, I came to learn that they neither lacked motivation nor had a negative attitude towards learning the English language. They were interested in speaking in English and were positive towards the English language use. However, some issues stopped them from using English. I assumed that the competence of the English language and the financial conditions must have been hindering them from learning English. Their responsibilities must have kept them busy to the extent that they could not give much time to their learning. Subsequently, the students realised that they lacked practice in English. This was good and shows positive signs of wanting to change. Their behaviour in the class with me has changed i.e. positively since we have had discussions for the research. They are friendlier to me and feel safe to share their thoughts and personal issues compared to before this research.

The survey questions asked (in written form) are given below.

Questions Asked	Yes	No
Do you like to speak in English?	100%	0%

How do you feel speaking in English?		Easy 1%	Hard 99%
Why don't you speak/ try to speak in English? What stops you from speaking?			
Fear: 10 Nervous: 1 Friends: 3 Difficult: 1	Grammar mistake: 14 No Practice: 1 Confidence: 9	Confusing language: 1 Word meaning: 1 Shy: 11 Pronunciation: 3	

Table 1. Survey Result of the Exploratory Research

Now that Manda has learned the reasons for her students' lack of interaction, what do you think she should do during the implementation phase to encourage her students in participating and sharing more often during the lesson?

Plans

Based on the exploration, I decided to conduct speaking sessions every Friday. I talked with my students about my motive, i.e. improving speaking skills. This began with me becoming friendlier. I started eating with them in the canteen and watched them play during the break. I also conducted a 'greenery day': an activity where students planted saplings. They brought homemade crafted or innovative environment friendly vases or any tools they could help with. With their active participation the environment day was celebrated as greenery day. Similarly, I decided to involve them in group activities for both grammar exercises and literary texts after they were aware of the motive and process of this research. I discussed with the students on conducting speaking English class every Friday.

As well as planning and conducting the activities, I continued teaching the course content because I needed to finish teaching the course on time.

Implementation

As planned, the first thing I did was conducting a speaking activity every Friday, which the students had also agreed on. For this, every week on Thursday, I assigned topics for discussion to five students. The topics for the speech were village, family, hobby, and likes or dislikes. I said that the errors would not be corrected, but rather in the case of need, they could seek help.

every Friday, I conducted activities that exclusively focused on speaking. For students who are given a topic on Thursday, I requested them to come and speak on it. In this first round, all the students spoke.

During the second round, students had to choose a topic themselves, such as discipline, pollution, environment, education, and so on. Based on the choice they had to be prepared to speak. The challenge I was facing then was their absence in the classroom- while I prepared my lessons with their speech as one of the activities, the students who were supposed to present on the day would be absent. When asked for an explanation, they would give the reasons, such as health, job, or family issues. On further inquiry, some admitted that they had no one to help or the internet access to look for help to prepare for their speech. Others didn't get time off from their jobs so they could not prepare. yet, others were not ready to speak because of their inhibition.

On the other hand, I also made the rule that no one will laugh while the other are speaking. To do this, I also counselled them on the students' feelings while speaking based on their discussion responses, to which they agreed. However, most were unprepared.

I made the students do an exhibition bringing some write-ups by themselves. I asked students with the internet access to help their peers who had no online access. The students with the internet access brought the discussion materials and collaborated with the students from other classes. The result was positive, and the class participation was encouraging.



Figure 1. Exhibition done by students among friends from other classes

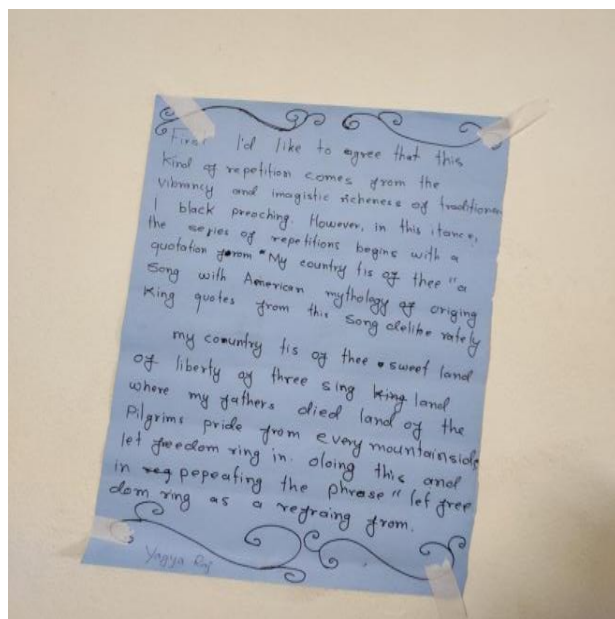


Figure 2. A text prepared by a student

Realizing and also expecting that only the efforts inside the classroom might work, I started making them read and discuss in groups. I reminded students not to laugh when their peers presented. Similarly, I told them that I would not make any corrections if they made mistakes. In their turn, the students had to speak something about the topic after discussion. Also, I told them that the group leader was required to answer if the member of the group was not able to answer.



Figure 3. Promoting mobile use in the classrooms

For all groups to participate actively and to provide the learning opportunity, each group had students with high and low competencies in the English language. Moreover, to provide support during the discussion phase, I moved throughout the class helping students or observing if they were working. I

allowed them to use mobile to find meanings of unfamiliar words.

During the discussion, when students in the group stated that they did not understand the reading text, I made the other groups help them. The group then presented with the help of their friends. The text was then assigned as homework so they could discuss on it the next day. Doing grammar exercises, I did the same and asked the group leader to answer. The placement of members in the group was the same every day. Therefore, for the English period, I managed to keep one active speaker in the group who would make the group members speak. Here, I concluded that the students were not confident enough to express and take initiatives.

Outcomes

After the implementation of my plan, I found the behaviour and attitude of my students towards me change. They were more comfortable speaking to me than before. They started sharing their family problems. My behaviour towards them, like holding their hands when they were speaking in front of the class, hands-on their shoulders, and a pat on their back, helped develop confidence in speaking. Some students started making preparations before they spoke. The impact was seen in their active participation in class and doing homework.

However, the impact was not much impressive. The girls lacked confidence and the absence rate of students was similar. Except for a few regular ones, the others were not participating adequately. Some of them left the school. Girls and boys still made excuses for jobs and did not have time for the preparations. Rather than learning, some students were only worried about the examinations. However, some students had an interest in learning English, as a result, they did homework and came prepared with the assigned task.

I found that the students relied on the rote-learning strategy. Some students were asked to read the chapter at home and explain their understanding the next day, but they learned the passages ‘by heart’.

Conclusion

My exploration was an insightful journey that changed me from an autocratic to a democratic teacher. It helped me understand my students, their problems, and issues with the English language learning. I became closer to my students emotionally and psychologically. My previous attempts to teach students went in vain because I was trying to control the students rather than guiding and facilitating. I scolded them and they became scared of me and thus couldn’t utter a sound in front of me. My scolding stopped and their motivation went up. The findings show that the psychological aspects like fear and confidence level are found as the responsible factors among other things. On the other hand, their competency level, comprehension level, financial condition, and responsibilities were the other factors that hindered their learning. I felt like it’s not just the English language itself but other factors like

financial conditions, irregularity in the class were the other factors which, unless controlled to some extent, changes would not be possible. These factors were affecting their English language learning and their education. Students are losing interest in their studies. Their work has become more important.

With the changing needs of students, we need to bring some change in our attitudes to look after them. We need to treat them in a friendly manner rather than as strict autocratic teachers. The nature of students has been changing and we need to adapt accordingly. They say they want to learn English but their competence in the English language does not match their level of education, they need our help as a friend. On the other hand, they are not ready to give more time for learning. Though I am aware of these dilemmas of students, I have not asked the about their English language learning.

I have concluded that for working students, especially those without guardianship, Kathmandu is like a foreign land. The students are more concerned about earning than learning. Among the students admitted in class 11 more than 15 of them have left their studies by the time they reached grade 12 and they, in turn, were not regular.

Though I couldn't improve much of the speaking skills of my students, I learned many things that have changed me. I learned that the needs and demands of students are changing with the changing time. For example, allowing students to use their mobile phone for the learning purposes inside the classroom motivates them. Along with enjoyment, they find themselves responsible. Every time we encounter a new student, we need to accept that that we might face some new issues. One research and its result may not be applicable for other classrooms.. Therefore, we need to keep on exploring, as each child is different with different issues and capabilities.

Appendix

Checklist for knowing factors responsible for students not interested to speak English

Q. Why do my students hesitate to speak English or English in class?

S.N	Name of students	Shy	Confidence	Lacking knowledge	Fear of teacher	Fear of speaking	Friends	Others
1.	Shere Tamang						√	Fear of making mistakes
2	Rohan Shrestha	√					√	pronunciation
3	Nani Basnet		√					Fear of making mistakes
4	Manil Kusule		√				√	
5	Aayush Balami							Can't express & understand meanings
6	Kamala Phuyal						√	
7	Nanu Shrimal	√					√	Spellings & meanings
8	Raju Ray Chhetri		√					Feeling odd to speak English
9	Gita Shrimal				√		√	Meaning-making
10	Kanchhi Majhkoti		√					English words and meanings
11	Anoj Kumar Maurya		√				√	English Meanings

12	Dhan Bhandari	√					√	Word structures and meanings
13	Binu Chaudhary						√	Meaning understanding
14	Subham Shrestha				√	√	√	Meaning
15	Jaya Rajak		√				No support from friends	Taking Initiations
16	Sanu Tamang	√					√	Grammar mistakes
17	Bibha Shrestha	√						Fear/ sentence formation
18	Alok Lama						√	Meaning
19	Ashesh Pokharel						√	Practice
20	Mohan Tamang							Shy/ Fear
21	Rakesh Balami					√		Fear of friends/ grammar
22	Indu Tamang				√	√		Fear/friends
23	Romi BK							Meaning/structure
24	Chana maya Tamang	√			√			Mistakes/fear
25	Salgee Chaudhary	√					√	Practice/grammar/ meaning
26	Hari Thapa	√						Lack of practice

27	Rozal Rai							Read but don't understand meanings
28	Shiva Thapa	√			√			Spellings, meanings, and making mistakes
29	Janak Thapa	√		√				Meaning/ Lack of knowledge
30	Deuti Magrati					√		Word meaning
31.	Paru Sunar		√					Pronunciation
32	Binod Pokharel							Grammar
33	Raja Bdr. Nagarkoti							Sentence structure/ verb Practice
34	Aakanshi Ghatane					√		Practice/ tense
35	Amol Gajmer					√		Practice/ Fear/ tense
36	Nabina Mijar					√		Sentence formation/ mistakes/hesitation
37	Karuna Shrestha					√		New friends
38	China Tamang							Cannot express meaning/cannot understand difficult words and structures
39	Kabi Pahari	√					√	Fear of making mistakes
40	Aashu B.K	√				√	√	
41	Manmaya Majkoti	√			√		√	

42	Sati Tamang							Fear of making mistakes
43	Rita Senchuri	√					√	Grammar
44	Brahma Gaire	√		√				
45	Parbati Maya Tamang	√	√			√	√	
46	Saraswati Tamang	√						Grammar and fear of making mistakes
47	Laxmi Tamang			√		√	√	Grammar use

Encouraging Students to Communicate in English

- Parshu Ram Shrestha
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Pointers for pondering

Think about these questions before you proceed to the research story presented by Parshu Ram Shrestha.

- What will you normally do if your students are not using English in the class?
- What techniques generally do you use to engage your learners in communicating in English?

Introduction

I have been teaching English at SOS Hermann Gmeiner Secondary School, Sunsari, Nepal, for the last 10 years. I teach students who are from the age of 8 to 17 years and from different backgrounds and abilities. There are three types of students in my school: those who are adopted and grew up in SOS Children's Village, those who are from economically well-off families, and those who are from poor communities. There is a heterogeneous mix of students from different backgrounds in each classroom. This can be challenging to the teachers, however, I have a positive attitude in the face of such challenges and in coming up with an appropriate solution.

Background

The problem I wanted to study was: *why my students hesitated to communicate in English with each other*. My school is reputed for being an English medium school since its establishment. However, recently I have experienced a growing trend among the students in using the Nepali language over English even though their textbooks are in English except the Nepali subject. Only in rare cases or in front of teachers, the students spoke English, but it was not compulsory for them. Even in the English class, they sometimes tried to speak in Nepali. This situation encouraged me, a teacher of English, to diagnose and solve the problem.

For this, I decided to conduct Exploratory Action Research (EAR) as I was convinced that it would be helpful in my classroom. Its growing worldwide popularity among the academic researchers for its scientific data collection and data analysis methods attracted me. Moreover, my regular class schedule would not be affected. Nor would I add extra load on it.

Introduction to exploratory action research

EAR is “one of the best approaches for addressing classroom problems/issues/challenges” (Negi, 2005, p. 5) since it helps a teacher cope with difficult circumstances in an effective way. It has been much popular among the ESL/EFL teachers in Nepal since it was introduced by Richard Smith in 2013 during a joint British Council-Ministry of Education project in Chile. It is already a tried and tested approach in teaching English to secondary-level students and has been “a way to explore, understand and improve” (Smith & Robelledo, 2018, p.20) teachers’ practices with “better understanding” and development of “more appropriate ways of teaching without waiting for solutions from outside” (Smith & Robelledo, 2018, p. 4).

The whole process of EAR is observed through two stages: a. Exploratory research, and b. Action research. The Exploratory research includes planning (thinking of preparing questions and collecting data), exploring (gathering data), and analysing and reflecting upon the data. The Action research stage is conducted with planning for intervention, implementing the plan, observing the effects of intervention, and reflecting upon the changes that occurred due to intervention (ibid., p. 25). In this paper, I will discuss how I applied the different stages of EAR in the context of my classroom.

My research questions

In search of a solution to the problem I noticed that my students could not, or did not like to speak English. I set the following questions for my study:

1. What are the difficulties or problems that my students are facing in speaking English in the classroom/school premises?
2. How do my students feel if I encourage them to communicate with each other in English?
3. What strategies can help my students mitigate their hesitation and speak English?
4. How much do my students participate in English speaking?

How did I explore my research issue?

I conducted a mini research to estimate the overall situation of the school and the students in the context of English speaking. To find out why most of the students were reluctant in using English to communicate with each other, I applied two methods:

- a. Interview with students
- b. Notes from informal talk with students and colleagues

First, I prepared two sets of questions separately for the teachers and students (See Appendices 1 & 1.1). Then, I chose two students from class 9 and two from class 10. I called the students for an

interview and asked them some questions separately. I started the talk informally and used a few unplanned questions. Finally, I asked them all the questions I had set and noted down their answers. Similarly, I had a round table talk with two English teaching colleagues and discussed the issue with them. I wrote down the points they mentioned. Lastly, I interviewed a Math teacher, Science teacher, and Account teacher separately.

Let's answer this question.

How did Parshu explore when he identified that the learners in his school were not using English as expected?

What did I find?

The close observation through the interview with my students and colleagues revealed some intriguing reasons that discouraged my students from speaking English. Peer pressure was the most striking cause of all. When the students tried to speak in English, then they were teased, humiliated, or excluded by others. They lacked the tendency to learn from each other. On the one hand, they lacked proper vocabulary and grammar for the day-to-day English conversation; therefore, they never felt confident while speaking in English, especially on casual occasions. On the other hand, they heard teachers speaking in Nepali with each other when they were expected to speak in English, and some even expressed their anger over it. Moreover, they felt that speaking in English was not compulsory in school except with the English teachers. Hence, the ones who wanted to learn to speak English were not motivated. Most students' environment at home was contradictory to their zeal for speaking in English. As Burns (2016) stated that the development of speaking in learners "requires intervention and guidance on the part of the teacher," I finally decided to find a way out for helping my students come out of their peer pressure and other hurdles related to speaking in English.

What were my plans for action?

First, I talked with my Principal and, with his consent, I prepared a stepwise plan of intervention to encourage my students to use more English. I declared during the school assembly about the ten-point strategies for promoting English speaking in the school (See Appendix 2). It was a plan to form a powerful English Speaking Monitoring Committee in coordination with the Vice-Principal, English teachers, Pastoral Head, and Primary Coordinator. The Committee, under the Principal, would oversee the Students' Prefect Council to regulate the English use in the classrooms and school premises. The Committee would hear the complaints of the students related to speaking in English and would deal with them: providing counselling or taking other necessary steps. As per the declaration, the committee would also reward two students from each class every term as the best English speakers.

Let's answer these questions.

What plans did Parshu design to tackle his issue of low engagement of the learners in communicating in English?

How did his plans align with what he explored earlier?

Implementation of my plans and the outcomes

For about a week through the implementation of the plans, the situation seemed to be improving. Most students were heard using English with each other, both in their classrooms and outside. The teachers also talked in English with each other and with the students. But unfortunately, this situation did not continue for long and gradually the English Speaking Monitoring Committee could not be as effective as I had expected it to be. It could hold only one meeting in three months after the introduction of the plans. The strategy to pick up and reward the best speakers from each class could not materialise, and the Students' Prefect Council could not be regulated for speaking in English. As a result, students were not interested in speaking English unless they were compelled. To some extent, they seemed rebellious as they were often heard saying 'Speak English!' to each other in front of teachers, and laughing or running away in the school premises.

I realised that I could not bring a school-wide change with many limitations. Personally, dealing with the students' issues like peer pressure outside the classroom was not feasible for me. Therefore, I decided to redefine my research field for the EAR and limit myself to only in my classroom. I chose Class 9B for this purpose. I prepared a questionnaire (See Appendix 3) and re-collected data from the students so that it would be easy for me to plan for future strategies in helping them use more English in the classroom.

Let's answer this question.

How did Parshu make his issue of low engagement of learners in English conversation manageable?

When I analysed the data collected through the questionnaire, I found out that most students, despite their interest in speaking in English, spoke the language only less than half their time in the class because they felt uncomfortable or lacked confidence. The students who wanted to speak English were either teased or laughed at by their friends or afraid of making mistakes in grammar and pronunciation. Furthermore, their habit of speaking Nepali also played a crucial role in the lack of English use in class.

Outside the classroom, the students did not speak English as much with their friends because it was uncomfortable for them. Their lack of knowledge in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation and the peer humiliation were big hindrances for them. However, most of the students spoke English with

their teachers because they thought they could improve their English or build up their confidence. Nevertheless, the number of students who felt nervous, shy, or uncomfortable speaking English with the teachers was also big.

With this new finding, I planned to provide most of my class time for the students to speak in English utilizing various student-cantered activities: pair/group discussions, role-playing, brainstorming, storytelling, interviewing, story completing, reporting, picture narrating, and picture describing (Kayi, 2006). I involved students in every speaking activity, and I would reduce my speaking time in class while letting them speak. I hoped that the activities would help them increase their English speaking proficiency.

Group work and group mingling. Group work “dramatically increases” (Harmer, 2007, p.166) the amount of students’ talking time, I thought of using it as frequently as possible for the maximum benefit of my students.

In a typical group work activity, I divided the whole class into two groups and assigned each group a task. The first group discussed and analysed the textbook they read in the previous class. The second group discussed and analysed their current textbook. I helped them make some opinions in their mind about the topics through brainstorming on the size, colour, topics discussed in the textbooks, pictures and diagrams. This activity would work as a catalyst to broaden their imagination, leading them to be creative and cooperative in group activities to become better learners (Cullen, 1998). After ten minutes, I called the first group to the front of the class and further divided them into two groups. I handed each group a piece of paper and told them to write down notes while discussing their topic. Each group sat separately in the class and started their discussion. Then I called the second group to the front of the class and broke them into two groups. I handed them, too, with pieces of paper and told them to write down the points. Now there were four groups of students altogether. Each group had 6 to 7 members.



Figure 1. Students in group discussion



Figure 2. Students in group discussion

I told all the groups that they had 10 minutes for the discussion. I told them that it would be a competition between the two groups discussing the same question. Then, they took part in the group discussion even more seriously. I observed their discussion and group participation and gave them more than the allocated time because I saw that they were actively participating in the discussion. My aim was to create an environment for them to speak in English and interact with each other. After a while, I called the next two groups who were discussing the same question separately to the front of the class. I let them talk to each other and participate in the discussion. I provided the other two groups the same opportunity. As the bell rang, I had to stop them. I told them that it would be continued in the next class.



Figures 3. and 4. Students' mingling

The next day, as I entered the class, I called the names of all students in the groups A, B, C, and D, and told them to sit in their respective groups. Then, I gave them five minutes to recall what they had discussed before. They took 10 minutes to discuss their issues.

While my students were getting engaged in discussion, I wrote down five criteria rubrics on the whiteboard so that it would be impartial and transparent. They were:

1. Equal participation- 5 marks
2. Knowledge of the subject- 5 marks
3. Confidence level- 5 marks
4. Loud voice- 5 marks
5. Presentation style- 5 marks

In total, there would be 25 marks.

I called the group, A, and they presented the findings of their group discussion standing at the front of the class. After their presentation, I announced criteria and marks given and counted the votes based on the audiences' hands raised. In this way, I got the result of all the groups. The presenters themselves would become judges for other groups. For the most part, I remained a facilitator.

Thus, I used peer pressure, which had always been a hindrance for my students in learning to speak English, for the positive outcome by motivating even the silent students to speak loudly to score points

for their group and encouraged each other to beat the competing groups. All the students showed their enthusiastic participation in the group discussions and presentations; they seemed excited and focused throughout the class.

I observed my students continuously for more than a month using a variety of methods and techniques in class and saw some positive changes in the students. They started opening up and asking questions to me. They always seemed ready to take part in any classroom activity. Most of all, they were friendly and supportive of me.

Reassessing the situation. I thought of reassessing the situation of the class via a questionnaire (See Appendix 4), and found that an overwhelming number of students of Class 9B now thought that their English speaking had improved since they had recently started to speak English more often. More than 70 percent of the students mentioned that they spoke English more than half of their time in the class in presence of their English teacher. However, the number of students who spoke English in the classroom without their English teacher's presence was still low. Most students felt happy or enjoyed speaking English because they thought I had given them sufficient opportunity to do so, and they felt encouraged and happy in the class. Yet, most of them did not speak English outside their classroom because they felt nervous or uncomfortable for fear that other students would tease them.

Let's answer these questions.

What kind of support did Parshu receive from his learners, colleagues, and institutions while carrying out his research?

What kind of help would readers might seek if they plan to carry out EAR based on their classroom experience?

What sort of challenges did Parshu face while implementing his project?

What changes did he get after implementing the plans?

Was Parshu successful in tackling the issues? What could be his next step?

Conclusion

There could be many factors in a school that discourage students from speaking in English though they may be practising other language skills, like reading, writing, and listening. Some of the problems are big for a subject teacher to solve, but a little more attention while planning a lesson can solve most of the problems at the classroom level. EAR is a good tool for a teacher for finding out the problems and challenges in the classroom and planning for appropriate intervention actions. A teacher can include many student-centred activities in his or her lesson plans to engage and encourage the students to speak more English. When teachers are serious in their efforts and make their students relate to their objective,

then their students are more inclined to help or obey them. Teachers need behave in a friendly manner with the students and create opportunities for them to learn by practising.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questions for students (interview)

1. How do you assess the present situation of English speaking in your school?
2. What are the factors that demotivate you in speaking in English at school?
3. What do you think can motivate the students to speak English more?

Appendix 1.1: Questions for teachers (colleagues) (interview)

1. On what occasions do students not prefer using English in general? In an English class?
2. On what occasions do students prefer using Nepali in general? In an English class?
3. What factors motivate students to speak in English?
4. Why don't students participate in English speaking activities?
5. How can we encourage students to speak English?
6. Why are students reluctant to speak English in the school premises?
7. Is it good or bad to make students speak English mandatorily in the school premises?
8. What are the strategies that can help make the students speak English?

Appendix 2: The assembly declaration

Questions used for exploration

1. Why are the students not encouraged to speak English in the school premises and classroom?
2. What can be done to encourage them to speak English?

Respondents

1. A Secondary English teacher
2. A Lower Secondary English teacher
3. A Primary English and Science teacher
4. A Secondary Math teacher
5. A Secondary Accountancy teacher
6. School Head, the Students' Prefect Council
7. A Senior Prefect of the Students' Prefect Council
8. A Senior Prefect of the Students' Prefect Council
9. A Student of Class 10

Problems indicated by the participants

1. The students can read and write in English, but they cannot speak English to express their opinion in an organised way.
2. English is not a medium in Pre-primary classes. teachers mostly use Nepali for classroom teaching; hence, the students don't get as much exposure as needed in their early childhood.
3. Students don't feel comfortable with English whenever they have to talk in casual situations. They lack confidence and fluency in English.
4. They fear peer humiliation when they speak English as their peers tease and exclude them for speaking in English.
5. The admin staff do not use English for communicating with the students.
6. Most teachers (except English teachers) do not communicate in English with the students. Therefore, the students feel comfortable talking about their problems or issues with other teachers than with the English teachers.
7. The teachers do not talk to each other in English even in the presence of the students.
8. The students do not have a good academic background. Most of the students do not get an opportunity to speak in English at home because their parents are not educated or cannot speak in English.
9. There is no strict enforcement of English medium in the school.

Suggestions from the participants

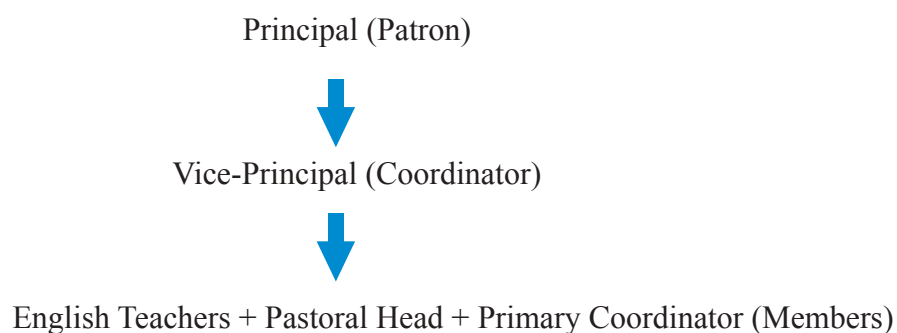
1. English must be strictly enforced as the medium of teaching (except Nepali and Moral

Education) from the primary level to the secondary level.

2. There must be zero tolerance to peer humiliation to those who speak English in the classroom and outside.
3. The teachers and admin staff must be convinced to compulsorily speak English with students.
4. Periodically, rewards should be given to students who speak English with classmates and teachers.
5. 'Speaking English Zone' boards must be hung around the school premises.
6. There should be strict monitoring of English speaking among the students. The students must be counselled or taken action as per need.

Strategies for English only environment in school (both in the classroom and school premises)

1. A pro-active and powerful English Speaking Monitoring Committee will be formed with the following members:



2. There will be regular meetings of the committee every 1st and 3rd Sundays in break time. The meeting will analyse the situation of English speaking in the school premises and the classrooms and make necessary future strategies.
3. All the Prefect Council members will be mobilised with full responsibility to regulate English speaking in the school premises and the classrooms.
4. If there is no Prefect Council member in a class, the Class Monitors will be default English Monitors.
5. All the Prefect Council members will compulsorily speak English in the classroom and the school premises. But they are allowed to speak Nepali in Nepali and Moral Study subject periods and with the subject teachers, in the sports fields and sports events, dance, and with parents/guardians.
6. If there is any complaint (oral or written) against any of the Prefect Council members (the School Head, Deputy Head, Senior Prefects, and House Prefect Leaders) for not speaking English in the school premises, the English Speaking Monitoring Committee will invite him/her in the meeting and warn or provide with the counselling. If necessary, the committee will decide to remove him/her from the Prefect Council.
7. The English teachers, Pastoral Head, Primary Coordinator, and the School Head will receive

complaints for not speaking English in the school premises and the classrooms and put them in the meeting for discussion.

8. If there is a complaint against any student, who is not a Prefect Council member, of not speaking English in the school premises or classroom, the Committee meeting will decide for necessary action or counselling.
9. In each term, two students from each class will be rewarded as English speakers. From each class, each subject teacher will recommend two best English speakers, and the names which are repeated for the most will be chosen for the reward.
10. The Principal, as the Patron, will monitor the English Speaking Monitoring Committee, admin staff, and subject teachers, and will frequently provide counselling to them for speaking in English with the students and between each other in the presence of students.

Appendix 3: A Survey of English speaking in students (14 November, 2019)

1. Do you like to speak English with your friends?

- a. Yes- 21 (81%)
- b. No- 5 (19%)

2. How much do you speak English with your friends in your classroom?

- a. Less than 25%- 10 (39%)
- b. 25-50% - 11 (42%)
- c. 50-75% - 5 (19%)
- d. More than 75% - (0%)

3. How do you feel about speaking English with your friends in your classroom? (Please write in points.)

Lack of confidence/ feeling uncomfortable- 15 (58%)

Feeling shy- 4 (15%)

Happy/Enjoy- 4 (15%)

Afraid- 3 (12%)

4. Why do you feel so? (Write any five causes.)

Friends laugh at/ tease me. - 13 (50%)

I am afraid of doing mistakes (grammar, pronunciation, etc.). – 9 (35%)

Habituated in Nepali. - 4 (15%)

5. Outside the class, how much do you speak English with your friends?

- a. Less than 25% - 14 (54%)
- b. 25-50% - 11 (43%)
- c. 50-75% - 1 (3%)
- d. More than 75% (0%)

6. How do you feel speaking English with your friends outside the class (while playing or doing something else)? (Please write in points.)

Uncomfortable/ nervous/ shy- 13 (50%)

Easy/ Comfortable- 10 (38%)

Afraid – 2 (8%)

Enjoy- 1 (4%)

7. Why do you think you have the problem/s you have mentioned above? (Write any five causes.)

Friends tease me because they don't speak English. -15 (58%)

I have problem/s in grammar/ vocabulary/ pronunciation. - 6 (23%)

I feel shy/ uncomfortable. - 3 (11%)

I am habituated in Nepali. – 2 (2%)

8. How much do you speak English with your teachers?

a. Less than 25% - 4 (15%)

b. 25-50% - 9 (35%)

c. 50-75% - 6 (23%)

d. More than 75% - 7 (27%)

9. How do you feel speaking English with your teachers?

I feel good/comfortable/easy. – 14 (54%)

I feel nervous/shy/uncomfortable. – 12 (46%)

10. Why do you think you feel as mentioned above? (Write five reasons.)

Speaking English will build up my confidence. – 11 (43%)

I will have an opportunity to improve my speaking of English. – 8 (31%)

I think my teacher will tease me when he hears me speaking English. – 3 (11%)

I feel scared and shy to speak English in front of my teacher. – 3 (11%)

I want to present myself as a good student by speaking English. - 1 (4%)

Appendix 4: Reassessment of English speaking in class 9B (21 January, 2020)

1. Do you feel your English speaking has improved recently? (You have been better at speaking English now than before.)

a) Yes – 24 (93%)

b) No – 2 (7%)

2. How much do you speak English in your classroom in your English teacher's presence?

a) Less than 25% - 2 (7%)

b) 25-50% - 6 (23%)

c) 50-75% - 9 (35%)

d) More than 75% - 9 (35%)

3. How much do you speak English in your classroom in the absence of your English teacher?

a) Less than 25% - 10 (39%)

b) 25-50% - 9 (34%)

c) 50-75% - 7 (27%)

d) More than 75%

4. In your classroom, how do you feel while speaking English with your friends?

a) I do not have confidence. Or I feel uncomfortable. – 7 (27%)

b) I feel shy. – 1 (4%)

c) I feel happy. Or, I enjoy it. – 18 (69%)

d) I am afraid of speaking English.

e)

5. Why do you feel so?

a) Friends laugh at/ tease me. – 2 (4%)

b) I am afraid of making mistakes (in grammar, pronunciation, etc.). – 5 (19%)

c) I am habituated in Nepali. – 5 (19%)

d) My teacher has provided me with more opportunities to speak English in the classroom. -
15 (58%)

e) ...

f) ...

6. In the classroom, how do you feel speaking English with your English teacher?

a) I do not have confidence. Or I feel uncomfortable. – 8 (31%)

b) I feel shy.

c) I feel happy. Or, I enjoy it. – 8 (31%)

d) I am afraid of speaking English.

e) I feel encouraged. – 10 (38%)

f)

7. Why do you feel so?

a) Friends laugh at/ tease me. – 3 (11.5%)

b) I am afraid of making mistakes. – (in grammar, pronunciation, etc.). – 5 (19%)

c) I have the habit of using the Nepali language. – 3 (11.5%)

d) My teacher has encouraged me to speak English. – 15 (58%)

e) ...

f) ...

8. Outside the class, how much do you speak English with your friends?

a) Less than 25% - 14 (54%)

b) 25-50% - 9 (35%)

c) 50-75% - 3 (11%)

d) More than 75%

9. How do you feel speaking English with your friends outside the class (while playing or doing something else)?

a) I feel uncomfortable/ nervous/ shy. – 14 (54%)

- b) I feel easy/ comfortable. – 6 (24%)
- c) I feel scared. - 2 (8%)
- d) I enjoy it. – 4 (15%)
- e) ...

10. Why do you feel so?

- a) Friends tease me because they don't speak English themselves. – 9 (35%)
- b) I have problem/s in grammar/ vocabulary/ pronunciation. – 6 (23%)
- c) I feel shy/ uncomfortable. – 3 (12%)
- d) I am habituated in using Nepali. – 6 (23%)
- e) I feel confident in speaking English now. – 8 (31%)
- f) ...

11. How much do you speak English with other subject teachers?

- a) Less than 25% - 4 (15%)
- b) 25-50% - 9 (35%)
- c) 50-75% - 10 (39%)
- d) More than 75% - 3 (11%)

12. How do you feel speaking English with other subject teachers?

- a) I feel good/comfortable/easy. – 5 (19%)
- b) I feel nervous/shy/uncomfortable. – 5 (19%)
- c) If I don't speak English, they will be angry with me. – 3 (12%)
- d) I think it builds up my confidence and improves my English. – 14 (54%)
- e) I want to be a good student. – 2 (8%)

Enhancing Students' Interests in Creative Writing

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Pointers for pondering

Think about these questions before you proceed to the research story presented by Pema.

- Why do you think some students lack interest in writing activities?
- What will you do if your students do not show any interest in creative writing activities?

Introduction

I am Pema Kala Bhusal Pandey and I have been teaching English at different levels for more than nine years. Currently, I teach English at Pathshala Nepal Foundation, Bagdol, Lalitpur and Unique College, Lalitpur. I have delivered teacher training sessions to middle-school English teachers on Motivation, Materials, and Technology (MMT) Approach on Classroom Teaching project, which was selected under the Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AEIF) in 2015 by the U.S. Department of State. I have taught an intensive two-year English Access Microscholarship Program sponsored by the U.S. Embassy, Kathmandu.

Background

I believe creative writing is a crucial skill, and every student must learn this skill. I want to enable my students to do well in writing. As a teacher, I have prepared lessons and activities to help my students develop their creative writing skills. For example, I have involved my students in free writing activities; I have discussed how to address different aspects of questions; I have conducted review sessions after exams to discuss how they could improve. Despite these activities, their writing was not on par as their writing lacked adequate content and had other issues.

When I assigned my students creative writing tasks, they did not seem interested. During the writing lessons, they usually take a long time to start writing. While I am aware that starting a piece of writing is generally difficult, I wanted to explore other ways to teach my students. Then, I came to learn about the Exploratory Action Research (EAR) project. I thought this was a golden opportunity in improving the creative writing skills in my students. Therefore, I planned to explore this issue.

Research questions

This research aimed to enhance the creative writing skills of students and explore to answer the following questions.

- a. What do my students think about the assigned tasks related to creative writing?
- b. What do I do when the students show a lack of interest?
- c. How can I make creative writing tasks more engaging?

Methodology

Before conducting the research, I talked about it with the academic coordinator. She accepted my proposal readily as this research was for the benefit of our students. Moreover, her positive remarks encouraged me to move ahead with my research. Next, I discussed my intention to conduct the research with my students. Then, I assured them to improve their creative writing skills by working together and supporting each other.

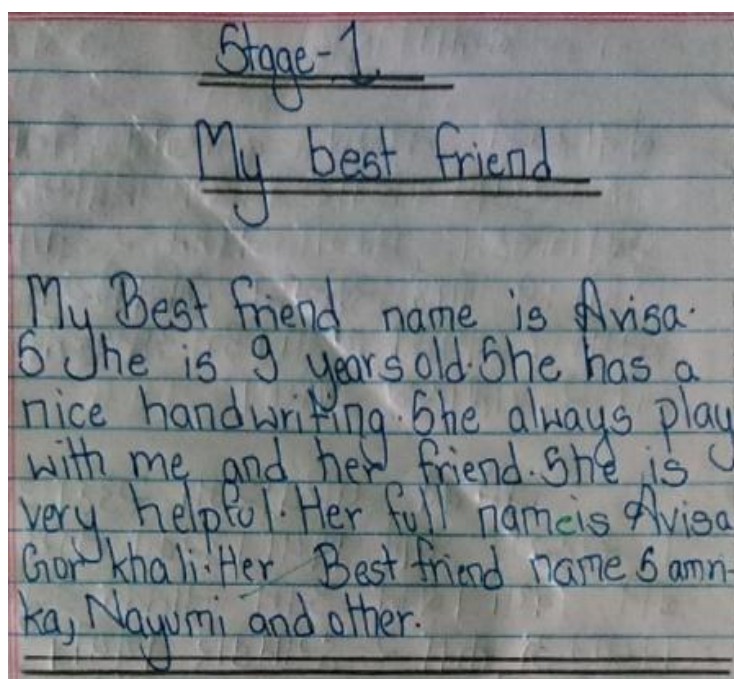


Figure 1. A student's sample writing on 'My best friend.'

To understand why my students were not excited about creative writing, I analysed their writing samples, interviewed them about their feelings about creative writing, and conducted a survey. To analyse their writing samples, I assigned them a writing task on 'My best friend' (stage 1) and provided instructions to write as much as they could. At this stage, I didn't teach them any ideas other than reminding them of time management. If students had any questions, such as queries related to spellings, I answered them.

Upon analysing their writing, I paid close attention to the content, language structure, and vocabulary to

understand their problems. It was evident from their writing that only a few of them wrote adequately. My observation confirmed that many of them struggled for ideas and they could not start the writing task, and many of them wrote very little.

I wanted to find out the reasons for my students' struggle in writing. Following are some of the quotes from them, which have been grouped under different headings based on the source of difficulties.

Difficulty Area	Writing Issues reflected by Students
Content	<i>Knowledge won't come quickly in my mind.</i> <i>No idea about the topic.</i>
Grammar and Spelling	<i>Lack of grammar and spellings.</i>
Grammar and Sentence structure	<i>Sentence will come into my mind but confused to write it correctly.</i> <i>At first, I remember the sentence but later, I forget.</i> <i>I get confused with the correct structure of the sentence.</i>
Timing and Planning	<i>I get stressed thinking that I cannot finish on time.</i>
Planning	<i>When I write about the second paragraph, I remember about the first paragraph.</i> <i>Mind gets distracted after taking the short break.</i>
Content and Planning	<i>If I think about one topic for a long time, I get confused.</i>

Table 1. Issues in Writing as stated by the Students

From the quotes (above) shared by the students, I realised that they struggled with content, vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and planning. Furthermore, I found out that most of my students struggled with the content, which I believe may have been the results of the lack of planning in writing.

Similarly, I prepared a questionnaire and distributed that to all my students. I then instructed them to complete the questionnaire as honestly as they could. The questionnaire explored my students' willingness and perceived skills in writing. I also distributed the same survey later after the action phase. The survey (Table 1) helped me understand and address the problems that my students had during the exploration phase.

Do you enjoy writing task?	Yes	Little/not fully	No
	85%	15%	-
How do you feel when your teacher asks you to do any creative writing task?	Happy	Worry and fear about my mistakes	Difficult
	75 %	20 %	5 %

What do you think your writing skill is?	Good	Bad	Poor
	40%	55 %	5 %
Do you want to make your creative writing skill better?	Yes	No	-
	100 %	-	-

Table 2. Survey result of the exploratory stage

The results of the survey demonstrated that most of my students were interested in writing. A majority of my students felt happy when I assigned them a creative writing task, and all of them wanted to improve their skills. However, the majority (55%) of my students felt that they lacked skills in writing. These results suggested that my students did not lack interest. Instead, it was their writing skills that caused issues.

In considering the data from all three sources, I realised that I needed to help my students develop their writing skills. Also, I felt that I needed to help my students learn vocabulary, grammar and other aspects of writing. As a teacher, I felt that I had the responsibility to help them, which I could do by providing opportunities and by engaging them in fun writing activities.

Before you read further, we would like you to consider the following questions.

- Now that Pema has explored the possible reasons for her students' issues in writing, what do you think she would do to help them?
- What would you do if your students were not interested in writing?

Plans for Action

Having completed the exploration stage, I started planning for the action. In order to improve their creative writing skills, I spent time exploring strategies and activities that I could use in my classroom. I read samples provided by our facilitators, surfed the internet, and tried to use my knowledge learned from different training and conferences. Finally, I decided to use the following strategies.

- Teach vocabulary (identify any five new words with their meanings and create meaningful sentences).
- Pre-teach vocabulary related to the topic.
- Begin the class with word games or fun activities like (ladder game, horizontal vertical game, telling motivational stories to make them physically and mentally ready for a creative writing class.
- Provide topic of their interest
- Brainstorm ideas through a mind mapping activity

Actions for change/ implementation of plans

Based on the questionnaire, survey, and observation of their writing skill on the topic 'My Best Friend', I came to realise that my student needed to improve their vocabulary to be able to write well. Therefore, I decided to focus on vocabulary teaching. I asked them to bring two to five new words, along with their meanings and sentences every day. I asked some of the students to share the vocabulary with other students in the class and encouraged them to use those words in their writing, however, I did not find it effective. While I thought they could learn some vocabulary by bringing new words every day, there was no connection between the topic and the word meanings they shared.

Not all students complete the vocabulary task when I assigned it as homework. Similarly, I thought it would be effective if they shared the words among themselves, but it was time-consuming and the class participation was irregular. I changed my strategy and discussed vocabulary related to the topic before they started writing. This worked well. Along with this, to run my class smoothly and to support their writing skill, I started each class with fun activities like word games, which was helpful in enriching their vocabulary related to the topic.

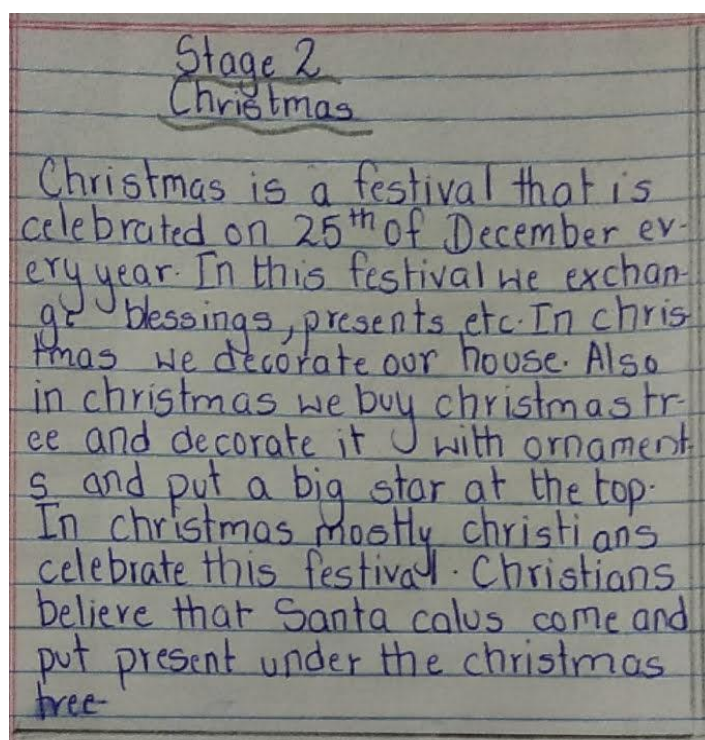


Figure 2. A student's sample writing on 'Christmas'

Likewise, in the second stage, I allowed my students to choose their writing topics of their interests (step 2). It was great to see them coming up with different and interesting topics, such as sports, their family, favourite games, festivals etc. This way, I thought that they were interested in writing and were able to write better content in comparison to the first topic I provided to them. But still, when I went

through their writings, it was not satisfactory (see Figure 2). I felt that they were not able to write well because they lacked ideas, which I believed could be addressed with proper planning.

I introduced an activity called 'Mind mapping'. I selected 'My best friend' as the topic for the writing activity because they were not able to write well on other topics during the exploration phase. While writing paragraphs, I discussed with my students about how they could plan what they wanted to write and the possible words that they could use. We then created a mind map that they could refer to during writing. After that, they all wrote a paragraph. The figure below (Figure 3) shows how my students made their mind map and used that to write the essay.

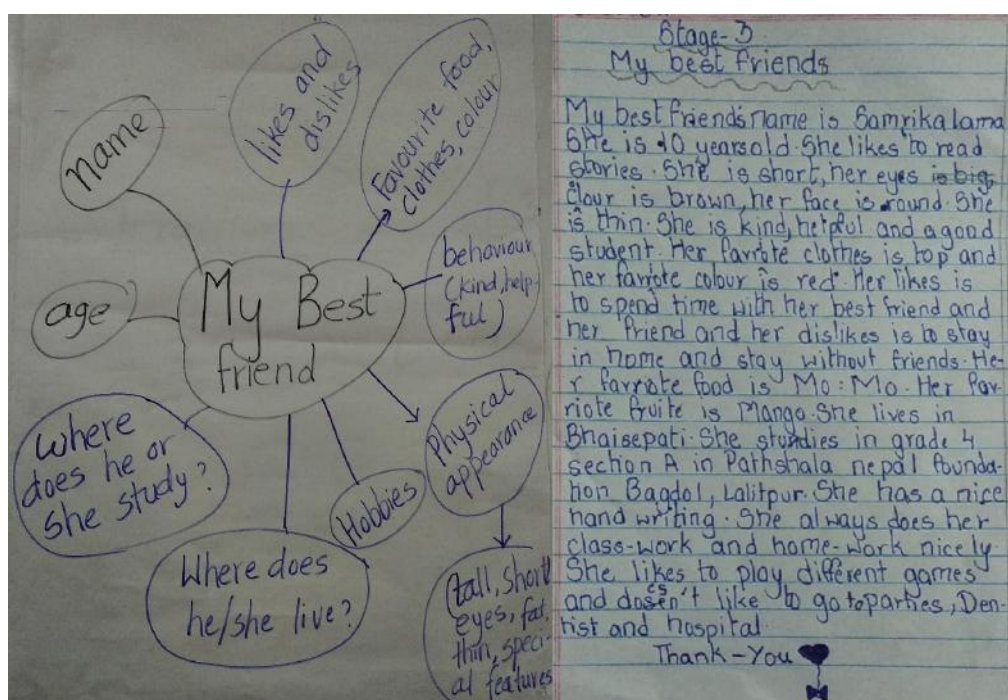


Figure 3. A sample mind map (left) and a paragraph (right)

Next, I divided the class into seven groups and assigned them 'Our School' as the topic for writing (stage 4). The students discussed in groups and created mind maps that they could refer to during the writing. Then the students developed a paragraph on the given topic. In the meantime, I went around the class and helped them by answering their queries.



Figure 4. Students working in a team and practising mind mapping activity



Figure 5. Students discussing in a team and writing a paragraph

What amazed me was that most of my students actively participated in the writing activities. I could see each one of them sharing their ideas and being engaged in the activities. The interesting thing was that even after the class, they wanted to add more details in their paragraphs. From their active involvement and improvement in their writing, I was impressed and encouraged at the same time.

An exciting part of this whole process was that they wrote reflective journals for their creative writing class. They started using the ‘mind-mapping’ strategy in other kinds of writing activities. For example, they used planning to write their diaries and reflective journals. The figure below shows an example of a reflective writing of a student where they have used mind mapping while planning for their ideas.

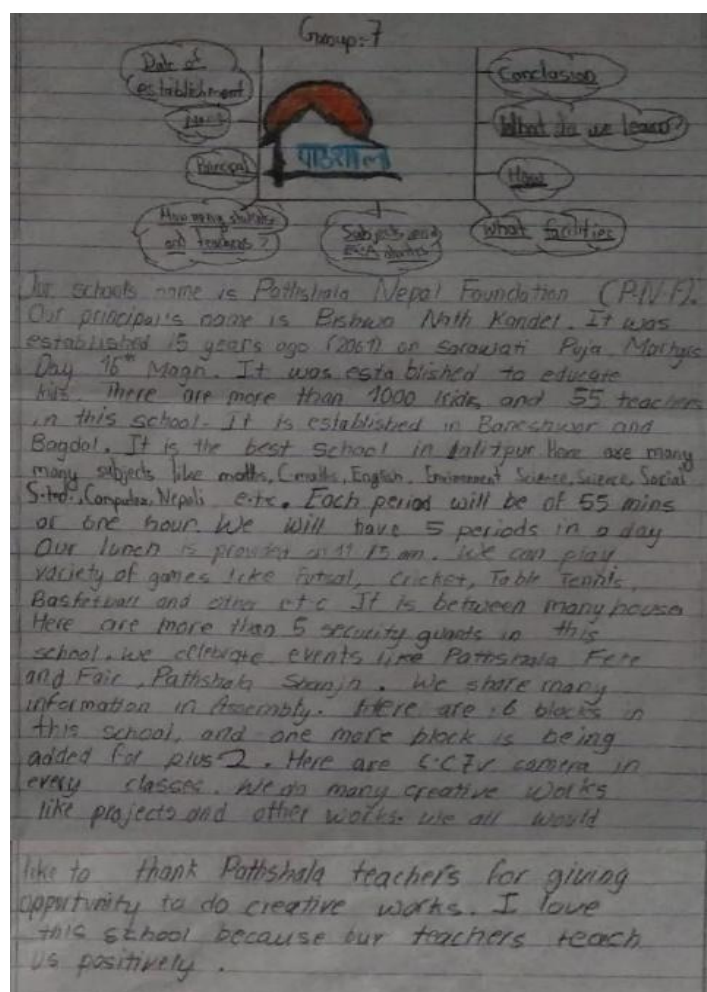


Figure 6. A sample writing about the school

While their writings still consisted of some minor mistakes, and they learned mind mapping skills, I realised this strategy supported them in planning and collecting ideas as that was the main issue they faced. This observation also made me conclude that the mind mapping strategy was one of the most important strategies in paragraph writing.

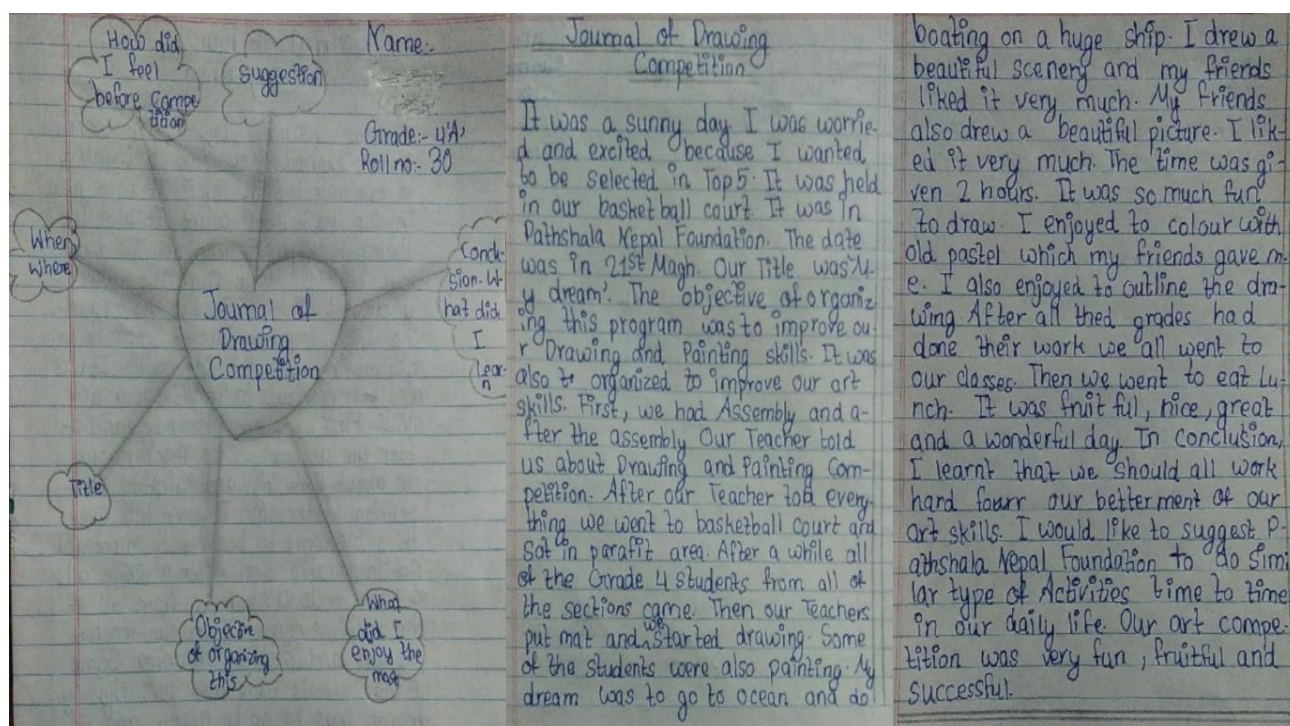


Figure 7. A sample journal writing about one of the school's event

I concluded the finding of my research and assessed their skills using a set of questionnaires (Appendix 1). However, I believe that if my students could collect ideas and were aware of what to write, they could create any piece of creative writing.

gradually, I am planning to use new strategies, like graphic organisers, to introduce other genres of creative writing. For the time being, I focused on paragraph writing so that they would learn to generate ideas required to write adequate content.



Figure 8. Students filling questionnaires after the actions were over

Now that you have read what Pema did to help her students improve their writing, we would like you to consider the following questions before reading further

Would you do anything differently than Pema? Or

Do you think Pema could have used other classroom strategies and writing activities to change her students' attitude towards writing activities?

Findings

On the basis of my observation of my students' interest in creative writing, I selected writing as the focus of my research. After I started taking notes, the first thing I noticed was their lack of interest and inability to write adequate content, which was due to lack of planning, and content and vocabulary knowledge. I realised that I did not try to address these issues before I started my research. But during this study, the activities designed to address their learning needs were helpful as they showed significant improvement. Even though it was difficult to measure the actual progress of students in quantity, I noticed changes in their writing skills.

I believe that mind mapping, in particular, helped them write better. Also, they enjoyed working in a group, sharing ideas and learning from each other. The students who did not have much interest and would spend time playing in the class started contributing their ideas in their group. Most of all, the ones who would never write a paragraph started writing paragraphs. This way, their activities showed changes in their skills. The most important thing was the drastic change in the attitude towards creative writing tasks. The students who would not enjoy writing started saying 'Yes' when they came to know about creative writing class.

In order to assess the changes in their attitude and confidence in writing, I asked them to complete a survey. The results of the survey showed that they enjoyed the writing lessons. The table below summarises the findings of the survey.

After the Action: Observation

Are you interested in creative writing task?	Yes	Little/not fully	No
	99%	1%	-
How do you feel when your teacher assigns any creative writing task?	Easy	Worry and fear about my mistakes	Difficult
	98%	2 %	-

Now, what do you think your writing skill is?	Very Good	Good	Poor
	60 %	40 %	-
I enjoyed creative writing classes.	Yes	No	-
	100 %	-	-
I can write enough content on the topic provided.	Yes	No	
	100%	-	-

Table 3. Survey result after the actions

Table 3 shows that the students seemed to have developed a positive attitude after the intervention activities. They seemed to have started to enjoy creative writing classes and have been able to write adequate content. Overall, they felt that they were able to improve their writing skills.

They also suggested in the survey that they enjoyed all writing activities, including mind mapping, working group, vocabulary activities and the moral stories that I shared before starting a creative writing class. Ankush wrote, *"In my first day of creative writing, my writing skill was very poor, but after practising every day, my skills are getting better."* Similarly, Numa wrote, *"I feel proud about my creative writing. Also, I feel confident about sharing my feelings without hesitation. Usually, my teacher appreciates my writing but by creative writing, it has developed my spelling as well. It made me motivated"*.

The quotes from the two students above demonstrate that their attitude, skills, and confidence in writing changed and they also developed other language skills, such as spelling. This finding affirms the argument that "creative writing enhances not only the writing skills of the learners but also it helps to improve all the language skills" (Akhter. 2014, p.1).

In addition, Shalin added, *"I feel great about my creative writing skill. I think I improved a lot in my writing because of my teacher and friends. The thing I liked the most about creative writing classes that we worked in a team and helped each other"*. This proves the class strategies that I introduced in the class helped her to improve her writing. I am happy with the outcome of this research because I have been able to identify real problems in creative writing. I came to know the effectiveness of my strategies and how to incorporate them according to the need of my students. My concern now is if they will continue progressing in their creative writing journey.

My reflection

When I first heard about the EAR project, I had my questions. But when I got the support from our school, started taking classes, and observed students' interest and improvement in their writing skills, I

got my epiphany moment for two reasons. Firstly, I firmly believed that the exploratory action research had helped me improve in my teaching style, my understanding of my students and their learning needs, and my rapport with them. Secondly, I became more aware of what I did as a teacher. I learned that if I failed in one strategy, I could try another one. Every little action that I took during my research had helped me in becoming a responsible teacher.

My teaching colleagues noticed that the students wrote better after the EAR research. Prior to the action research, many of them struggled in their writing. They could not express their feelings in writing. Now, they are able to elaborate in their writing. They could express their opinions and plan their writing.

Overall, this research has been a great learning experience and, I believe that I can conduct similar research in the future.

Conclusion

As a teacher, we face many challenges, and we doubt our students' ability to learn. From this research, I have realised that the problem is not always with students. If we reflect on our activities and the challenges that the students face, we can help them learn.

Reference

Akhter, N. (2014). *The Effectiveness of Creative Writing in Language Learning: A Comparative Study between Bangla Medium and English Medium Elementary Level*. [unpublished Master's thesis] BRAC University.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Questionnaire during exploration

Student's Name (optional) -

Grade:

Read the questions carefully and tick (✓) or write the answers where necessary.

1. Do you enjoy writing tasks? Yes
 - a. Little/not fully
 - b. No
2. How do you feel when your teacher asks you to do any creative writing task?
 - a. Happy
 - b. Worry and fear about my mistakes
 - c. Difficult
3. What do you think your writing skill is?
 - a. Good
 - b. Bad
 - c. Poor
4. Do you want to make your creative writing skill better?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Questionnaire: After the Action (Observation)

Student's Name-

Grade-

Read the questions carefully and tick (✓) or write the answers where necessary.

1. Are you interested in creative writing tasks?
 - a. Yes
 - b. Little/not fully
 - c. No
2. I enjoyed creative writing classes.
 - a. Yes
 - b. Not fully
 - c. No
3. I can write enough content on the topic provided.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. How do you feel when your teacher assigns any creative writing task?
 - a. It's difficult

- b. Worried and fear about my mistakes
- c. I feel easy

5. Now, what do you think your writing skill is?

- a. Very good
- b. Good
- c. Poor

Please, express your views on the following questions without any hesitation.

6. What do you feel about your creative writing skill? Do you think you improved your writing?

Ans: _____

7. What did you like the most about our creative writing classes? Any suggestions?

Ans: _____

Appendix 2. Lesson plan samples

Exploration Phase

Objectives: At the end of the lesson, students will be able to fill a set a questionnaire and write a paragraph on 'My Best Friend'.

Facilitator's Activities	Students' Activities	Time	Materials
Warm-up with quiet time.	Follow quiet time sincerely.	5 mins.	A set of questionnaires
Share to the students about the objectives of today's class and the purpose of conducting research on creative writing. Also, orient them about the questionnaire they are going to fill.	Listen to the teacher's instruction and clarify the confusions they have.	10 mins.	
Distribute questionnaire. Make sure they are sincere in their opinion. Collect the questionnaire from the students. Orient the students that they are going to write a paragraph on 'My Best Friend'. Now, do not teach them any format or what to include in their paragraph because you are exploring the issues in their writing. Finally, collect their work. Wrap up the class asking some of the students to share about today's class.	Fill the questionnaire teacher has provided. For example: Are you interested in creative writing? How do you feel when your teacher assigns you any creative writing task? Etc.	10 mins.	
	Submit to the teacher.	5 mins.	
	Listen to the orientation, clarify the confusions and write a paragraph on the topic provided using their pre-knowledge. Then, submit to the teacher.	25 mins.	
	Share their ideas and feelings from the beginning of our class to the end.	5 mins.	

Implementation phase

Objective: At the end of the lesson, students will be able to write a few paragraphs using a mind mapping activity.

Facilitator's Activities	Students' Activities	Time	Materials
Begin the class with a vocabulary game, 'Horizontal/Vertical'.	Come 4 of the pairs in the front, create as many words as possible in a minute with the help of a word told by their partner. Make sure the words they create should be related to school. (the topic they are going to write)	5 mins.	Loose sheets, markers, sketch pens and pencils
Revise the ideas about what mind mapping is and how does it help to elaborate a paragraph.	Listen to the teacher and take part in the discussion.	5 mins.	
Orient the students clearly about today's topic i.e. 'My School' and discuss some vocabulary related to it (from the HV game as well). Divide them into seven different groups, provide loose sheets and necessary materials.	Listen to the orientation, clarify the confusions and be in their respective groups.	10 mins.	
Let the students write a few paragraphs about their school. Facilitate and motivate where necessary.	Discuss with their team members, create a mind map and write a few paragraphs about their school.	35 mins.	
Wrap up the class by asking two of them to share their experiences.	Two of the students share their experiences of working in a team, creating a mind map and elaborating the points.	5 mins.	

Students' Reluctance in Using English as a Means of Interaction in Classroom

- Pushpa Raj Paudel
(pushpa.r.paudel@gmail.com)

Pointer for pondering

- What will you do to interest your students to interact in English?

Introduction

My name is Pushpa Raj Paudel. I have been a teacher of English for the last ten years. Presently, I teach English at secondary and tertiary levels at Sainik Awasiya Mahavidyalaya, Sallaghari, Bhaktapur. I am a lifetime member of the Nepal English Language Teachers' Association (NELTA) and a member of TESOL International. I have interests in research, education, translation, teacher networking, and teacher development.

Background

I have been working as an English teacher for the last ten years. I feel that teachers can encourage students in speaking in English within their classroom and outside. Parents aspire to see their children speak English correctly and fluently. On the contrary, majority of the students tend to switch to their native language when they are out of the sight of their teachers and school administration. This made me interested in carrying out this research study.

Students in my class were not interested in using English as a means of communication. Whenever I asked them to speak in English, they either remained silent or used languages other than English. To explore why my students hesitated to speak in English and to understand how I could support them to bring about the change, I decided to conduct this Exploratory Action Research (EAR).

Objectives

- to identify the reasons responsible for my students' unwillingness in using English; and
- to find out some of the efficient ways to encourage my students in speaking in English.

We would like you to consider the following question before reading this report further.

What issues did he want to address in this research?

Research questions

I wanted to investigate why my students were reluctant in using English as a means of communication in their classroom. I planned to explore the reasons in detail before jumping into an action because I was quite sure that I should not take any action in haste by simply guessing what works and what not. Therefore, before actually taking any action, I made a plan about exploring the exact reasons responsible behind the students' reluctance in using English, the following exploratory questions were in my mind:

- What are the factors responsible for making students disinterested in using the English language as a means of interaction in the classroom?
- How can I improve the existing situation to ensure students' active participation in speaking English in the classroom?

Exploration methodology

Before formally beginning the research project, I briefed the school Principal about the EAR project and my intention to carry out this research. He was happy to learn that I was going to collect data for my study from my students and it was an effort to improve my practice.

After I got consent from the school to carry out the research, I prepared a questionnaire incorporating both the open and the close-ended questions (See Appendix) to find the answers to the research questions. I informed my students about the purpose of this research and their voluntary involvement in the study, and I asked for their consent for using the research data. I assured them of the complete confidentiality of the data that they provide.

Data collection

In order to identify the actual reasons responsible for students' reluctance in using English as a means of communication in the classroom, I prepared the following questionnaire. I requested them to respond to each question honestly.

Questionnaire				
S.N.	Questions			
1.	Are you interested in using English as a means of interaction in the classroom?	Yes 65%		No 35%
2.	Are the activities related to speaking English used in the classroom interesting?	Always 28%	Sometimes 58%	Never 12%

3.	How often do you get the opportunity to participate in speaking activities in the classroom?	Always 15%	Sometimes 55%	Never 30%
4.	Suggest some of the interesting activities that you would like to practise in the English class.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Watching videos - Playing games - Singing songs - Visiting libraries 		
5.	What do you feel about using English as a means of interaction in the classroom?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All the time speaking English is boring. - Beneficial for future - Useful in lower grades - Difficult due to lack of vocabulary and pronunciation - Friends laugh - Hesitation and fear of making mistakes - Do not like to be showy - I love speaking English. 		

Table 1. Survey result of the exploratory stage

Informal group discussion with students

Informal discussion is very useful in getting some real information about a particular issue. So, to get an authentic information, I talked to my students informally in the classroom and playground to find out why they were not willing to interact in English with other. I also played with them during the break. While playing with the students, I used the Nepali language as a medium of interaction to make them feel comfortable and elicit information about the lack of English usage. I wanted to be an insider while discussing this with them. In other words, I approached them as a friend and I was accepted. This made me find the real causes underlying within them regarding their reluctance in using the English language as a means of communication in the classroom. I recorded the informal interaction with the students.

One of the students said to me in Nepali, “*ma angrejima bolda sabaijana haschhan*”. “*All of my friends laugh when I speak the English language.*” Likewise, another student said, “*Malai angreji bolne bani chhaina ra sathiharule jiskauchhan bhanera dar lagchaa.*” “*I am not habituated to speak English, and I have a fear of losing my nose in front of my friends while speaking English.*” Similarly, the third student said to me, “*Grade XII pachhi ma social service garne ho, tyasaile malai angrejimaa tyati interest nai chhaina*”. “*I am planning to involve myself in Social Service after Grade XII. So, I*

don't have much interest in speaking English." The other student said to me, *"angreji bolne awasar nai paaidaia. Course pani lengthy chha. Dherai discuss garna nai vyaidaina. Tyasaile aru subjectma pani discuss kam hune hunale haami angreji bishayama pani dherai boldainau ra bolne samaya pani paudainau."* *"We lack opportunities to speak in English. In fact, we can't discuss it because the course itself is very lengthy. So, we don't have enough time to discuss. Since there is very little discussion in other classes, we don't like to discuss much in the English period. Actually, we don't get enough time to speak as well."*

Data analysis

After I collected the data, I tabulated the survey responses using the Microsoft Word programme. The analysis of the data illustrated that 65% of students were interested in using English as a means of interaction in the classroom and 35% of students responded that they were not interested in using English. Similarly, their responses to my query about the exciting activities in the classroom showed that 28% of students found the activities used in the classroom were always interesting, 58% of students replied that the activities were sometimes enjoyable, and 12% of students responded that the activities that I used in my lessons were not interesting. As for my query about whether they got opportunities to participate in the classroom activities in my class, 15% of students responded that they always got the opportunity to participate in the speaking activities in the classroom, 55% of students indicated that they sometimes got an opportunity to participate in such activities, and 30% of students noted that they never got opportunities to participate in the speaking activities conducted in the classroom.

For the question on the activities that interested them, a majority of my students suggested that watching videos, playing games, singing songs, and visiting libraries were some of the activities that they believed could help them improve their spoken English.

Regarding the use of English as a means of interaction in the classroom, my students said the following: speaking English all the time was boring for them; making students speak English all the time in the classroom was beneficial only in the lower grades; using English became difficult for them because they have limited vocabulary and knowledge of appropriate pronunciation of the words, they have fear that they will lose their faces if they do not speak well etc. Peer pressure, hesitation and fear of making mistakes were some of the main causes responsible for making them reluctant in using English as a means of interaction in the classroom. Some of the students also responded that they loved speaking English and used it as a means of interaction in the classroom.

After the analysis and interpretation of data, I came to a conclusion that despite students' interest in speaking English, different factors hindered them from speaking English. Some of the major factors as mentioned by the students were peer pressure, lack of appropriate opportunities, lack of practice, and the fear of making mistakes.

Point for reflection

Now that you know why Pushpa's students were reluctant to speak English as a means of communication, can you think of what classroom strategies might help encourage his students to speak English?

Plan for action

In order to create a conducive English speaking environment in the classroom, I decided to bring some changes to my lessons according to the feedback I received from the students after the exploration of the problem. I decided to involve my students in the learning activities by offering more time to practice English with each other. I made my lessons more interactive. I also planned to deliver lessons using ICT to motivate the students so that they would be encouraged to interact more.

Action for change

As I collected the information from my students and began to explore possible ways for teaching English to help my students improve their communication skills in the English language. I consulted different sources on the internet. Similarly, I consulted with my colleagues who had more experience in teaching English.

Previously, I predominantly used lecture methods while teaching, and I took the students only occasionally to the multimedia room to let them watch videos related to the lessons. As I participated in the a year-long webinar on action research, I came to know about very useful insights in enhancing teaching-learning practice through action research and by using learner-cantered techniques and methods of teaching. In order to encourage my students to enhance their interest in English, I started changing my teaching style. I started adopting more learner-centred techniques, such as helping them participate in the teaching-learning practice. I encouraged some of the students to read aloud the text by inviting them to the front of the classroom. I gave them opportunities turn by turn. Similarly, I allowed more talking time to the students in the classroom.

I divided the students into five groups and developed a quiz based on the text and organised a competition. Student participation and interaction were remarkably enthusiastic. I encouraged my students to use English as a means of interaction in the classroom showing its importance to them in the future and told them not to tease one another for not speaking in English properly by telling them that failures are the pillars of success. I offered them more practice time in the classroom. Likewise, I incorporated audio and video materials related to the topic and helped them listen and watch.

Similarly, I started teaching the students using technology such as PowerPoint slides, Internet resources, mobile phones for songs and games etc. I offered my students' opportunities to prepare lessons using the

PowerPoint. We decided on group presentation dates according to their schedule. When they worked in groups, I found them communicating more, and I took advantage of the situation and encouraged them to speak English. This motivated my students to learn better communication skills in English. The lessons that I used to teach traditionally using purely the lecture methods were available on the internet with their visual presentations. Despite the availability, I rarely used these resources before. However, after I realised their importance while exploring the real reasons behind students' reluctance in using the English language as a means of interaction, I used several resources and learned many things and used them in the classroom teaching.

Jan 15, 2019

Fifth Period

1:10 pm

As I offered to read the lesson 'The Tell Tale Heart', a story by Edgar Alan Poe to some of the students inviting them to the front of the class, they were excited. The rest of the students silently listened to their friends. Perhaps, it was a new experience for both the students who got an opportunity to read and those who were listening to their friends. After this activity, I divided the class into 5 groups assigning 8 students in each group as there were 40 students in the class. I asked each group to summarize the first 8 paragraphs by allocating the paragraphs to each group. The students were seen busy discussing the summary of each paragraph that they were supposed to do. I encouraged them to interact in English among one another. The classroom environment was different today than usual.

Finally, I asked them to prepare PowerPoint slides of the respective paragraphs to present in group in the classroom fixing the comfortable date for them. I also told them that I would show them the video based on the same story by taking them to the multimedia room the next day.

Reflective note that I wrote after a class

After the action: observation

After I implemented my plan, I requested the students to respond to the questions- Are you interested in using English as a means of interaction in the classroom? Are the activities related to speaking English used in the classroom interesting? How often do you get the opportunity to participate in speaking activities in the classroom?

The results showed that 77.14% of students were interested in using English as a means of interaction in the classroom, which was more than 12% comparing the number of students before the plan was implemented. Likewise, 60% of students responded that the activities related to speaking were always interesting, 37.14% of them replied that the activities were sometimes interesting and 2.86% of students viewed that the activities in the classroom were never interesting. While comparing these responses, it became obvious to me that the activities that I incorporated in my teaching were- students reading aloud the text by coming to the front of the class, showing videos related to the lesson to the students, students preparing for their presentation in the group and presenting in the classroom, and

providing more student talking time in the classroom. Similarly, after the implementation of the plan, it was found that 57.14% of students always got opportunity and 42.86% of the students sometimes got an opportunity to participate in the activities. So, student participation was increased after the implementation of the action. As I brought changes in my teaching style by reducing my talking time and increasing students talking time in the classroom, I found that the students were more engaged in communication. For example, I encouraged students to come to the front of the classroom turn by turn and read the story “The Tell Tale Heart”. I also encouraged them to summarize the paragraph as assigned to them. The students were busy discussing with each other. Similarly, I also showed them a video related to the same story and asked them to prepare for the PowerPoint Presentation in the group. The students were seen excited and encouraged to learn with increased interaction in English. The data presented in the following pie charts show the same.

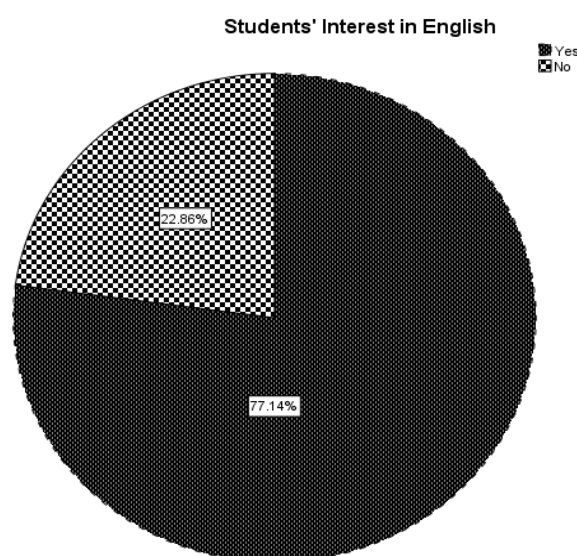


Figure 1. Students' interest in learning English after the action

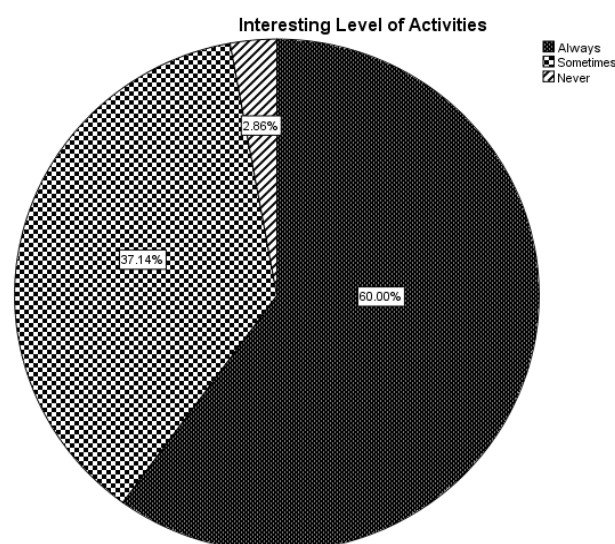


Figure 2. Students' interest level in speaking activities after the action

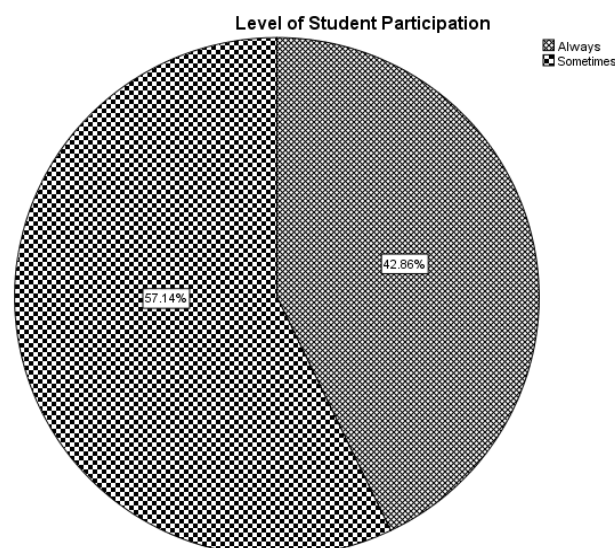


Figure 3. Participation in speaking after the action

Reflection

This action research provided an opportunity to reflect on my teaching and student behaviour in my lessons. I have been observing in the classroom as a teacher of English for the last ten years. There are many students in the classroom who hesitate to ask questions to their teachers. They are reluctant to participate in the interactional activities conducted in and out of the classroom due to their incompetency in English. They have the fear of losing face in front of their colleagues if they do not speak correct English. Similarly, I, as a teacher, feel the pressure from different angles. The students are not seen much willing to speak in English even in the classroom. They switch to Nepali when they are out of their teachers' sight. The parents aspire to see their children develop the English language

proficiency. The school administration does not allow them to speak any languages other than English in the school premises.

In order to motivate my students and to improve their English proficiency, I adopted various strategies, like- explaining the importance of the English language in the national and international arena, adopting new techniques of teaching English such as using ICT in the classroom, encouraging the students to prepare PowerPoint Presentation and present the lessons in the class, and providing more talking time to the students in the English classes.

Conclusion

It is said that a good teacher tells, an average teacher explains, and a great teacher inspires. To be a great teacher, one needs to have knowledge and skills to motivate, inspire and encourage the students, and that knowledge and skills can be acquired by conducting research and by being honest to one's profession. EAR helps identify problems and solve them for improved teaching (Negi, 2019). The EAR helped me understand the real causes behind my students' reluctance in using English as a means of communication in the classroom. It was carried out to find out how the students viewed speaking in English and the current status of its use in the classroom and provide suggestions to improve the existing situation to ensure the students' active participation in English speaking. After the action was implemented, the data revealed that there was an increase in the number of students who were interested in using English. Similarly, making students participate in the teaching-learning practice by allowing them to involve themselves in various activities, like reading aloud by coming to the front, participating in the classroom talks in the presence of a teacher, showing videos related to the texts in the course, helping them work in groups for presentation. To sum up, I was able to bring changes in my traditional teaching styles by providing more talking time to the students inside the classroom, blending technology with teaching and learning, and offering them more time for group presentations.

Reference

Negi, J. S. (Ed.) (2019). *Exploring for action, acting for change: stories of exploratory action research in Nepal*. <https://www.supportsocietynepal.org.np/publication/>

Appendix: Questionnaire administered during exploration

1. Are you interested in using English as a means of interaction in the classroom?

Yes

No

2. Are the activities related to speaking English used in the classroom interesting?

Always

Sometimes

Never

3. How often do you get an opportunity to participate in speaking activities in the classroom?

Always

Sometimes

Never

4. Suggest some of the interesting activities that you would like to practise in the English class.

5. What do you feel about using English as a means of interaction in the classroom?

Enhancing Reading of Basic Level Students in English

- Puskar Raj Bhatta
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Pointers for pondering:

- Do your students enjoy reading?
- What challenges did you face as an English language learner to develop your reading skills?
- How can EFL/ESL teachers help their students develop their reading skills?

Introduction

My name is Puskar Raj Bhatta and I have been teaching English for over a decade. Currently, I am working as an English teacher at the basic level, Grades six through eight at Prabhat Basic School, Kaski in Nepal. I have a keen interest in technology in education, and I strongly believe in classroom-based research.

Background

Basic Education Curriculum (Curriculum Development Center, 2020) of the Nepal Government aims to enable students to exchange ideas with people of any nationality who speak or write in English. It also aims to expose them to the vast treasures of knowledge available in both printed and electronic forms. While the English curriculum is designed to teach all four language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing), more emphasis is placed on the reading skill as it comprises 40% of the total weightage.

I believe that reading is the most powerful learning tool for overall language development. As a teacher, I have always tried to teach reading skills to my students. For example, I used various kinds of reading texts from different sources to design and include reading activities regularly in my lessons. Despite my attempts, my students did not seem to be interested in reading as they were reluctant to complete the reading activities. They often struggled with reading because of pronunciations as they spelled out each letter before they pronounced it correctly.

As an English language teacher, I wanted to help my students develop their reading skills, but I lacked the understandings of their situation. Without knowing their current language levels, I could do nothing other than teaching them reading as I had been doing. Hence, I decided to conduct this exploratory action research (EAR) in my class so that I could understand why my students did not attempt to read by themselves. I chose Grade seven for this research.

Research questions

I wanted to explore why my students struggled in the classroom. So, I set the following as the research question for my exploration:

- What do my students think of reading in English?
- Why are they not interested in reading even when I motivate them in reading?
- How can I engage my students in reading in English?

Methodology

I decided to explore what my students thought of reading in the English language because in an exploratory action research, “a teacher involves himself/herself exploring his or her own practice and then acting on his/her findings to improve the situation” (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018 p. 20). Before I started my research, I discussed my intention to undertake the action research with the school principal and sought the consent. Next, I informed my students about the research, sought their approval, and informed them how the research could help to improve their reading skills.

In order to explore and understand what my students thought of reading, I needed to collect information from them and reflect on my reading lessons. So, I prepared a questionnaire (see Appendix 2) to see why my students were not excited about reading. I interviewed them to find out their opinion on reading in English. Next, I also asked one of my colleagues to observe the reading session in my classroom.

As the first step to my exploration, I distributed the questionnaire to all the students in the classroom and instructed them to complete the task honestly. The result of the survey (Table 1) helped me collect the perception of my students about reading in English:

Questions		Yes	No
1.	Do you like reading in English?	100%	0%
2.	How do you take the reading texts in your textbook?	Not much difficult	Difficult
		10%	90%
3.	What makes it difficult to read in English?	I have difficulty in decoding even a single word.	13%
		I have difficulty in reading with fluency	11%
		I forget as I go on reading.	8%
		I read but do not understand anything.	42%
		I do not know the meaning of the words.	26%

4.	Which reading activities do you like the most?	I like reading texts with very simple sentences.	73%
		I like reading pictorial texts.	20%
		I like reading long passages.	7%

Table 1. Survey result of the exploration

The table above showed that most of my students were interested in reading. However, the majority of the students considered reading text included in their textbooks to be difficult. A few of them had difficulty in reading because they did not understand the vocabulary and many of them (about 42%) suggested that they read simple texts but had difficulties in comprehension. Nonetheless, most of them (73%) liked reading very simple texts. The findings revealed that my students had interest in reading English texts but with difficulties with vocabulary and text comprehension. Similarly, they lacked skills in reading long and complex sentences.

After analyzing the survey results, I wanted to talk to my students individually in the classroom. In an informal talk, one of the students, Gopal (pseudonym) said, *"I like to read but I don't get much time at home and here the lesson time is also too short to read."* Another student, Shanti, said, *"The English texts are too difficult to read by ourselves. Sir you read and tell us in Nepali."* Besides, another student, Manoj, added, *"I can't [pronounce] words correctly and even don't know their meanings."*

The above quotes shared by the students demonstrated that they were interested in reading, but they struggled with pronunciation, unfamiliar vocabularies, and long sentence structures. They accepted that they wanted to read but they did not have much time either in the classroom or at home. They seemed scared of reading by themselves.

Similarly, I asked one of my colleagues to observe the reading of my students in the class while I facilitated them through reading. She took notice of the things that happened during the lesson. Her observation (Table 2) looked as follows:

My colleague's class observation notes:	
1)	Despite the fact that you utilized all three stages of reading as pre-reading stage, while reading stage, and post reading stage the students seemed rather reluctant.
2)	They paid very little attention to the ways you utilized while engaging them in reading.
3)	When they read the text, they even could not decode the simple words. Decoding is a problem with many students.
4)	Some of the students hesitated when given individual reading tasks.
5)	Some students found the longer sentences confusing.
6)	They did not seem to have prior-knowledge on reading.
7)	They need special care, motivation and inspiration for good reading.

Table 2. My colleague's class observation notes

The reading of observation notes from my colleague helped me in confirming the information that I collected through the survey and the interview. It confirmed that my students had difficulties in reading. Their existing reading skills were poor, and they struggled with pronunciation and vocabulary. Now, this exploration changed my perception towards my students regarding why they did not attempt to read in English. I also thought the problem was not only with the students but also with my lesson design and delivery.

So, I came to the conclusion that the students of Grade 7 liked reading in English, but they could not do it due to their poor vocabulary, pronunciation, and inadequate reading practice. I needed to help them with vocabulary and reading comprehension from very simple reading texts to longer ones.

Before reading further, we would like you to consider the following questions.

1. If you were Puskar, what would you do to help your students improve their reading comprehension?
2. What other things can make students struggle with reading texts in English?

Plans for action

Having gone through the exploratory phase of my research, I made intervention plans to bring changes in the reading habits of my students. The action plans included the following.

- Raising the phonemic awareness to help with pronunciation (using phonemic symbols and charts)
- Pre-teaching vocabulary of reading texts
- Reading competition on reading simple sentences (provided by the teacher)
- Reading comprehension practice

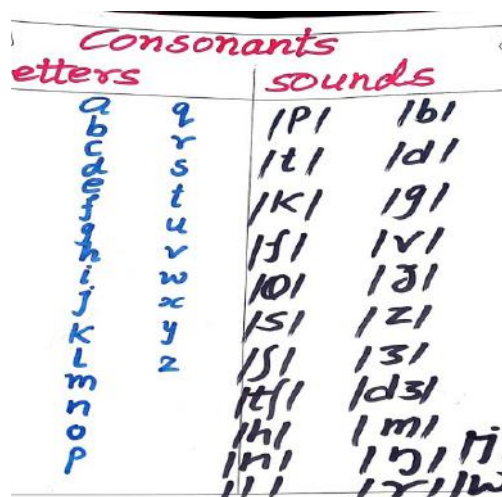
I started making lesson plans every day for two weeks. Then I started collecting materials for going through all the above-mentioned interventions. As for the reading text, while some texts were suitable from the prescribed textbook, I downloaded some from the internet. Most importantly, in the beginning, I paid full attention to selecting the relevant and interesting lessons for my learners. At the same time, I divided the lesson time as 10 minutes for the pre-reading activities, 25 minutes for the while-reading stage, and the remaining 10 minutes for the post-reading stage. Every day they had 25 minutes of class time for reading and they had further practice as I assigned them reading tasks as homework.

Action for change

i) *Phonemic awareness and pronunciation*

I believe that phonics lesson could help my students improve their reading skills. So, I designed dedicated lessons on phonemic awareness. For the lesson, I divided my students into three groups with four members in each group. They were seated properly, and I interactively started my lesson, as I mentioned in the lesson plan (see Appendix 3).

I assigned them a pre-reading task, which included practicing sounds. I wrote all English letters on the left side and their corresponding sounds on the right side. Then I asked the students to practice on segmental sounds and English alphabets.



Consonants	
letters	sounds
p	/p/
b	/b/
t	/t/
d	/d/
k	/k/
g	/g/
f	/f/
v	/v/
s	/s/
z	/z/
x	/x/
ch	/tʃ/
sh	/ʃ/
ph	/f/
th	/θ/
dh	/ð/
nh	/ŋ/
lh	/l/
rh	/r/
wh	/w/

Figure 1. A chart showing consonant alphabets and the sounds they represent

vowel letters	vowel sounds	
	short	long
a		
e	/ɪ/	/i:/
i	/ʊ/	
o	/ʌ/	/u:/
u	/ə/	/ɜ:/
	/e/	
	/æ/	/a:/
	/ɒ/	/ɔ:/

Figure 2. A chart showing vowel alphabets and the sounds they represent

For while-reading tasks, I asked my students to do the matching activities, which included matching letters with their sounds and words with the corresponding sounds. For this task, they were provided with letter-cards, sound-cards, and word-cards. They categorised vowels and consonant sounds. Finally, I had them write in their notebooks all the letters, sounds, and example words for each sound, as shown in figures 3 and 4 below. At the end of the lesson, I assessed their achievement by asking some oral questions in the classroom.

English consonants in words		
1- /p/	→	Pen, copy, happy
2- /b/	→	back, baby, job
3- /t/	→	tea, tight, button
4- /d/	→	clay, ladder, odd
5- /k/	→	key, clock, school
6- /g/	→	get, giggle, ghost
7- /f/	→	fat, coffee, rough
8- /v/	→	view, heavy
9- /θ/	→	thing, path
10- /ð/	→	this, other
11- /s/	→	soon, sister
12- /z/	→	zero, music
13- /ʃ/	→	ship, sure, national
14- /ʒ/	→	pleasure, vision
15- /tʃ/	→	church, match
16- /dʒ/	→	judge, age, soldier
17- /h/	→	hot, whole, ahead
18- /m/	→	more, sum, hammer
19- /n/	→	nice, know, Sun
20- /ŋ/	→	ring, anger, sung
21- /l/	→	light, valley, feel
22- /r/	→	right, sorry, fear
23- /j/	→	yet, use, when
24- /w/	→	wet, one, when

Figure 3. A chart showing the consonant sounds and their example words

Diphthongs		Vowel Sounds in words	
1- /eɪ/	→ lady, make	1- /i:/	→ see, feel
2- /ɔɪ/	→ boy, noise	2- /ɪ/	→ sit, little
3- /aɪ/	→ my, time	3- /ʊ/	→ wood, put
4- /aʊ/	→ now, round	4- /u:/	→ you, rude
5- /əʊ/	→ go, home	5- /ʌ/	→ bus, but
6- /ɪə/	→ here, beard	6- /ɜ:/	→ bird, girl
7- /ʊə/	→ Pure, sure	7- /ə/	→ about, alone
8- /eə/	→ care, dare	8- /e/	→ set, pen
		9- /æ/	→ pat, cat
		10- /ɑ:/	→ half, part
		11- /ɒ/	→ not, cost
		12- /ɔ:/	→ caught, all

Figure 4. Charts showing Diphthongs, vowel sounds and their example words

ii) Pre-teaching vocabulary

The usual instruction on pre-teaching vocabulary started with warm-up activities. I wanted to see their existing knowledge of frequently used vocabularies. I wrote the words on the board, and they were told to read them aloud and note them down under separate heading as 'familiar words' and 'unfamiliar words'. They did it all in groups. Then according to the lesson plan (Appendix 4), I introduced two kinds of vocabulary lists in the classroom. I had them prepare vocabulary charts. They prepared and hung them on the side walls.

Low frequency words		High frequency words	
remote	दुर्गम	every	meet
Preserve	बचाउनु	flight	celebrate
altitude	उचाइ	alone	see
migratory	वसाहसराहने	tonight	freeze
agony	हिड	reach	sleep
pretend	बाहना	feel	shallow
twilight	आँदुली	clever	direction
		hard	straight
		step	scan
			wait

Figure 5. Low and high-frequency words

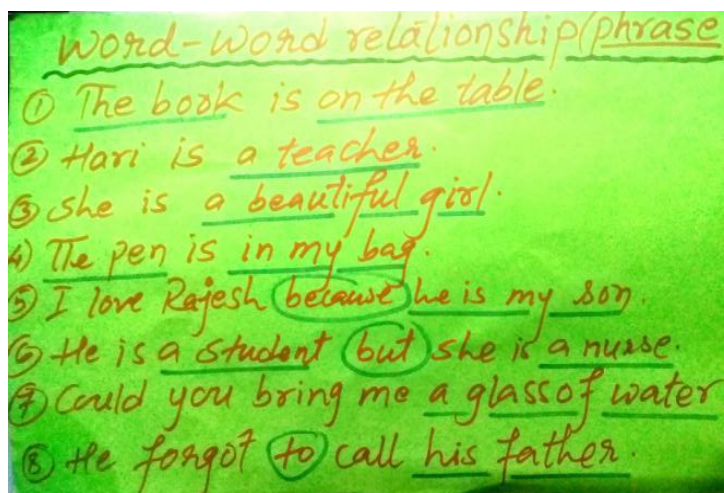


Figure 6. A chart showing word-word relationship

Next, I discussed with my students how the forms of words change. After the discussion on the vocabulary and the pronunciation of those words, I made them use those words in their sentences. I also showed them through different charts how words are formed out of letters.

For example: how car becomes cars by adding plural marker 's'

As in: dog – dogs, table – tables

In another case with different plural markers as in: wolf – wolves, knife – knives, switch – switches, bench – benches

Similarly, I discussed how nouns are formed through irregular formation, as in foot – feet, child – children, tooth – teeth, etc.

As in the case of nouns, I discussed with them on how English verbs are formed by adding –s/-es, -d/-ed, -ing as in the following verb formation: walk – root verb

walks – third person singular, present tense

walked - past tense and past participle

walking - present continuous tense

Later, I discussed how words are related at synonymous and antonymous levels. Then I made my students look at the low-use words based on their reading texts which might not appear in the next lesson like high-frequency words. I distributed them a word list of high-frequency words for self-learning as an assignment.

Finally, I assessed my students' knowledge of vocabulary using different activities such as multiple-choice items, fill in the blanks, matching, finding true/false. I repeated similar lessons for about a week.


iii) Reading comprehension practice

As planned (see Appendix 5), I downloaded reading comprehension activities from the internet to provide students with extra opportunities to practice their reading skills. Dividing the students into groups, I distributed reading worksheets as in figure 7.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Comprehension Check #18

Directions: Read the short story. Answer the questions.




On Friday, Jan started to feel sick.
Her throat hurt. Her nose was running.
Jan's mom took her temperature.
Jan was hot. She had a fever.
Her mom gave her medicine.
Jan took a long nap.
When Jan woke up, she ate soup.
She started to feel a little better.

- When did Jan start to feel sick? red
- How do we know Jan was sick? orange
- What did Jan's mom give her? yellow
- What did Jan do when she woke up? green
- What do you do when you are sick?

Name: _____
Class: _____

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Part A: Read.



This is May. She's ten years old. She's tall and thin.
She's got long brown hair. She's got brown eyes.
She can sing and dance. She can't swim.

Every Monday, May reads Chinese books with her friends.
Every Tuesday, she rides a bike to school. On
Wednesdays, she plays music at school. On Thursdays, she
sings English songs with her friends. Every Friday, she
cooks eggs at home.

Part B: Write the day please.

Part C: True or False.

- May reads Chinese books. _____
- May rides a bike to school on Fridays. _____
- She plays music at home. _____
- She plays music at school on Wednesdays. _____
- She cooks pizza. _____

Part D: Please answer Yes or No.

- Does May ride a bike on Mondays? _____
- Does May sing English songs? _____
- Does May cook on Fridays? _____
- Does she play music on Wednesdays? _____
- Does May read Chinese books on Tuesdays? _____

ISTCollective.com

Figure 7. Sample reading worksheets. Retrieved from: https://busyteacher.org/classroom_activities-reading-worksheets/

They read the texts on the worksheets and completed the tasks. The comprehension exercises consisted of fill in the blanks, matching words with their similar and opposite meanings, yes/no questions, and short questions. While students were completing the tasks, I went around the classroom and helped them by answering their queries. It motivated them to work on their own in groups which I believe helped the students who struggled with reading. As we discussed the words from the text during the pre-teach activities, students did not find it challenging to complete reading tasks and the accompanying exercises.

After completing the worksheet, I divided all the students into two groups and distributed information gap worksheets having only half the text and half blank. As the worksheets, group 'A' had to talk to the group 'B' to complete the worksheets (see Appendix 6). Then they worked together in their respective groups and completed exercises in the worksheets. As a result, they got the same reading texts entitled 'World Book Day'. I continued these lessons for two weeks and observed their overall reading habits and assessed them using the tools I used during the first phase (exploratory stage).

Findings

Based on my observation of my students' interest and self-motivation, I focused on reading lessons for two weeks. I noticed a gradual change in my students reading habits. The students who were unable to pronounce words, made generalizations, and those who were unable to read simpler texts showed a sign of progress as they were able to read simple text. This made me realize that the intervention was helpful and supportive. Although it was much difficult to measure the actual changes in reading habits directly, I could see changes in my students.

The overall reading plan I made during 'action for change' helped me and my students overcome the fear of reading. The students who struggled to read made significant progress working in groups as well as sharing and learning from the good readers. More importantly, their negativity toward reading in English changed unbelievably

The result of the survey (Table 3) below presents the students' perception of reading.

Questions		Before		After	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
1.	Do you like reading in English?	100%	0%	Not asked	
2.	How do you take the reading texts in your textbook?	Difficult	Not much difficult	Difficult	I can do now
		90%	10%	7%	93%
3.	What makes it difficult to read in English?	I have difficulty in decoding even a single word.		Before	After
				13%	3%
		I have difficulty in reading with fluency		11%	5%
		I forget as I go on reading.		8%	2%
		I read but do not understand anything.		42%	7%
		I do not know the meaning of the words.		26%	8%

4.	Which reading activities do you like the most?	I like reading texts with very simple sentences.	73%	81%
		I like reading pictorial texts.	20%	12%
		I like reading long passages.	7%	7%

Table 3. A survey result after implementation of the action

The table above shows that all of my students seemed to have interest in reading. Most of the students (93%) agreed that they could read the texts in English. After the intervention, the students seemed to have overcome the challenges of pronunciation and vocabulary - only a very few students had difficulties in those areas. Teaching vocabularies before the reading was found to be one of the best reading interventions. That helped them understand what they read in English. Moreover, most of the students (81%) liked to read in English with very simple sentences. The survey result showed that they enjoyed reading with the activities that they took part in.

After the survey, I talked to some of my students about their perceptions and feelings towards reading in English after the interventions. One of my students Ranjit (pseudonym) said, *"I think I have improved my reading gradually. Practice on familiar and unfamiliar vocabularies and simple reading texts helped me a lot to do so."* Another student, Sita affirmed, *"Practice on new types of reading tasks changed my idea of reading in English. They helped me gain new ideas about reading."* Similarly, Bishal accepted, *"I feel glad to share that I have collected enough courage to read in English. Things have changed now than before. I am not afraid of reading at all. I can do something now."*

These quotes of the students showed that they had gained some confidence and skills in reading English. This affirmed with the argument pointed out by Ur (2013) that in order for students to start developing reading fluency, they needed a lot of practice at the early stages in reading and understanding very short simple texts at the word and sentence level. The varied activities motivated the students towards reading and re-reading quite often.

One of the sub-skills of reading which involved recognising alphabets as graphical symbols and their combination to form words and word-word relationships to form a sentence helped my students more than anything in their early reading activities.

Additionally, one of the students Arpana accepted, *"Starting reading from very beginning with the help of recognition of alphabets to the reading of simple sentences made my journey of reading strong enough."* This quote affirmed that the interventions I introduced in the reading of English helped students develop confidence and skills.

Another source of my information was my colleague's observation note. As in the phase of exploration, this time also I asked my colleague to observe my reading lesson and give me her feedback. Her notes (Table 4) proved that my students got opportunities to improve their reading in English.

2. What my colleague said after observing my class...

- 1) *The basics to English – engaging the students in sound-letter activities was motivating and meaning making.*
- 2) *Students worked better in groups rather than working on their own. Even the poor ones got chance to interact and read in turn with the help of others.*
- 3) *Pre-teaching vocabulary and engaging them in different activities help the students strengthen their command over reading later.*
- 4) *Although many students did better, individual caring is needed for 2/3 students who couldn't do as expected.*

Table 4. My colleague's observation notes after the action phase

My reflections

My journey of exploratory action research has become memorable. While it was tedious having to teach and manage my working hours, it was professionally satisfactory, nonetheless. I had only read about exploratory action research but never done actual action research. The journey made me realize that undertaking a research was different from reading the literature. The insights that I gained from my mentors, colleagues, and university teachers helped me a great deal to complete this research and write the report. This journey helped me realise my strengths and weakness as a teacher.

Most importantly, I got opportunities to understand my students' level in reading and could also manage to transform the challenge into opportunities to bring out the positive vibes into the teaching career. My students who were struggling with simple reading in English have now become confident learners and readers in English. This is one of the best moments of my teaching career.

Conclusion

On completion of this EAR, I concluded that any action research with its exploratory part, in the beginning, is more effective than starting the research at the action phase without exploration. This experience helped me gain new insights and skills in conducting a research like this.

The changes in reading habits of my students that I perceived upon the completion of my action plan was satisfying. They became interested in reading, practiced and improved pronunciation, practiced vocabulary, and continued reading.

Moreover, as I went through this whole process of EAR, which in itself was a new avenue for me to grow and experience, I came to realize how to address the classroom challenges in the teaching-learning process. I learned that any type of classroom issues, problems, and challenges can be solved through EAR. To Sum up, a teacher research carried out within the four walls of a classroom can support the pedagogical and professional growth of the teacher.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Activity chart

Week 1

Exploratory Activities/Action Plan	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6
Exploratory questionnaire fill up						
Colleague's class observation						
Informal talk with the participants						
Planning with the students						
Phonemic awareness and decoding						

Week 2

Activities	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6
Practice on phonemic awareness and decoding						
Pre-teaching vocabulary						
Engagement through simple reading worksheets						
Observation and reflection						

Appendix 2. Questionnaire during exploration and after exploration

Name of the student:

Class: Roll No:

Q. No. 1. Do you like reading in English?

a) *Yes*

b) *No*

Q. No 2. How do you take the reading texts in your text book?

a) *difficult*

b) *not much difficult*

Q. No 3. What makes it difficult to read in English?

a) *I have difficulty in decoding even a sing word.*

b) *I have difficulty in reading with fluency.*

c) *I forgot as I go on reading.*

d) *I read but do not understand anything.*

e) *I do not know meaning of the words.*

Q. No 4. Which reading activities do you like the most?

a) *I like reading texts with very simple sentences.*

b) *I like reading pictorial texts.*

c) *I like reading long passages.*

Appendix 3. Lesson Plan 1

Grade: 7

Date: 2076/10/17

Subject: English

Time: 45 minutes

Teaching item: *Phonemic awareness and Decoding*

1. Objectives:

On completion of this lesson, the students will be able to:

- a) categorize English alphabets and their corresponding sounds.
- b) read the alphabets exactly like the sounds.

2. Teaching Materials:

Flashcards, English sound chart, and daily used materials

3. Learning facilitation process:

a) Pre-reading stage

- The teacher writes all English alphabets on the left side and their corresponding sounds on the right of the board.
- Then, he encourages the students to guess what he is going to do. Tells them that their answers do not have to be correct.
- The students observe the things written on the board and guess.
- Finally, the teacher informs them that he is going to teach them the letter-sound relationship in an organized and logical sequence.

b) While-reading stage

- Divides the students into three groups ensuring four students in each.
- Gives them separate letter flashcards and sound cards to read aloud in a group.
- Moves around the class and supports them if necessary to match the letters with their corresponding sounds.
- Now the students submit their group task to their teacher.
- Then the students are taught that there are predictable relationships between sounds and letters which allow children to apply these relationships to both familiar and unfamiliar words and to begin to read with fluency. They are further told that the letter, for example, represents the sound /n/ and that it is the first letter in words such as nose, *nice*, and *new*.
- The teacher further makes it clear by showing the sound chart that though there are only 26 English letters, they come with 44 English sounds comprising 12 English monophthongs and 8 diphthongs as vowels, and 24 as consonants.
- Teaches phonics systematically and explicitly showing how a single vowel sound and consonant sound contribute to form a syllable that further forms a word. A chronological

order of how a minimal sound unit forms a syllable and a syllable a word.

c) Post-reading stage

- Asks the students to engage themselves in reading individual words applying the phonics information as given in the following list of words:

Tight, ladder, ghost, coffee, rough, photo, author, cease, national, pleasure, soldier, hammer, sung, arrange, beauty, queen, one, yet, etc.

4. Reflection and assessment

- Assesses the learners' achievement in each activity carried out above and provide remediation on the spot.

Appendix 4. Lesson Plan 2

Grade: 7

Date: 2076/10/19

Subject: English

Time: 45 minutes

Teaching item: *pre-teaching vocabulary*

1. Objectives:

On completion of this lesson, the students will be able to:

- identify the selected high-frequency vocabulary words that are necessary for reading comprehension.
- note down the low-frequency vocabulary which is selected based on their level of importance in the text.

2. Teaching Materials:

Vocabulary lists, and daily used materials

3. Learning facilitation process:

a) Pre-reading activities

- The teacher writes some words on the board and has the students say which they can read easily and which they cannot.
- The students try to read them and put them into two groups as familiar words and unfamiliar words.
- Then the teacher helps them why some of the words are familiar and others are unfamiliar. This goes on for some time.

b) While-reading activities

- The teacher hangs two sorts of vocabulary lists on the board. One of the lists is low-frequency vocabulary and the other is high-frequency vocabulary list.
- He has the students read and write them in the copy. Then they try to decode them one by one.
- The teacher mingles around the class to support them if they come across any difficulty.
- He asks them to use the words in their sentences.
- Finally, he gets the students to practise on synonyms and antonyms of the words they were practising.

C. Post-reading activities

- The students are asked to find more such high-frequency words on their own from the previous Grade books, too.
- Then the teacher gets them to relate them to the reading lesson they are going to read either in the classroom or at home.

4. Reflection and assessment

- Assesses the learners' achievement in each activity carried out above and provide remediation on the spot.
- Different vocabulary assessment items such as matching wording with their meanings, multiple-choice questions, true/false questions, and fill in the blanks questions will be used for the immediate evaluation of the students.

Appendix 5. Lesson Plan 3

Grade: 7

Date: 2076/10/22

Subject: English

Time: 45 minutes

Teaching item: *Engagement through simple reading worksheets*

1. Objectives:

On completion of this lesson, the students will be able to:

- go through the reading worksheets.
- complete the worksheet working in groups.

2. Teaching Materials:

Sample reading worksheets, and daily used materials

3. Learning facilitation process:

a) Pre-reading activities

- The teacher enters the classroom and starts writing his bio-data, followed by a simple exercise on the board. He has the students guess why he wrote that. Then they guess and tell the teacher their guesses. Both the teacher and the students discuss for a while on the bio-data.

b) While-reading activities

- The class is divided into three/four groups and seated accordingly.
- The teacher distributes the photocopies of simple reading worksheets to each of them.
- They are asked to go through it for about 10 minutes and then work on the exercises which follow.
- They read and discuss in their respective groups and complete the exercises on the worksheets.
- While they do so the teacher mingles around so that he can support them with any difficulty they feel.

c) Post-reading activities

- The worksheets are collected and cross-checked in the groups.
- The teacher gives a brief talk on the reading worksheets upon their completion.
- He tries to connect them to the similar reading texts given in their textbooks.

4) Reflection and assessment

- The teacher asks each of the group leaders to reflect on the reading worksheet.
- He assesses their engagement on the reading worksheets which were quite simpler than that of the ones given in their textbooks.

Appendix 6. Reading worksheets

Group 'A'

Look at the text below. You have half the text and your partner group has the other half.

1. Take turns with your partner group to read and write the missing words.

World Book Day

Every year on April 23rd millions of people around the world _____.

The date is important because two great writers died on this day in 1616;

_____ Miguel de Cervantes, the Spanish writer.

_____ (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)

_____ city is Incheon, in the Korean Republic.

_____ special day?

_____. People wear costumes of their favourite book characters,

_____, story-tellers read to children and adults ... and _____.

_____ some of the events for this year.

Retrieved from: <https://en.unesco.org/events/world-book-and-copyright-day-2015>

Group 'B'

Look at the text below. You have half the text and your partner group has the other half.

1. Take turns with your partner group to read and write the missing words.

World Book Day

_____ celebrate books and reading on 'World Book Day'. _____;

William

Shakespeare, the English playwright and poet

and _____.

Each year UNESCO (_____)

chooses one city to be the World Book Capital City. This year the

_____.

So, what happens on this _____?

Schools, book shops and libraries hold all kinds of fun events, _____

_____, authors sign copies of their books,

_____ much more.

Have a look at the website to see _____

Retrieved from: <https://en.unesco.org/events/world-book-and-copyright-day-2015>

Involvement of All the Secondary Level Students in Free Writing Activities

- Rima Karna
(rimakarna96@gmail.com)

Pointers to pondering

Think about these questions before you proceed to the research story presented by Rima Karna.

- What would you do or think when you find your learners able to produce free writing responses below their writing-skill level?
- What are your techniques in teaching free writing to your students?

Introduction

I have been teaching as a secondary level English teacher at Janaki Secondary School, Saketnagar, Janakpurdham for five years. I teach English from grades 8 through 10. The students are from economically poor family backgrounds. Their attendance at school is not regular because they help their family businesses such as teashops, flower shops etc. This results in students not being able to give adequate time for their studies. These students have no avenue for English language exposure outside their school. Consequently, it is very difficult for these students to enhance their writing skills. I have been thinking about helping my students with the English language and the EAR has provided me the right opportunity to explore and enhance their English language writing skills.

Background

While I was examining the students' answer sheets for one of the examinations, I found that most answer sheets did not have well-written answers. This was not the first time that I had noticed this problem in my students' writing. I decided to find out the reasons behind their dissatisfactory writing. When I asked them about their writing experience, most students said that they cannot express their ideas and thoughts in English. One of the students summed it all, "*My parents speak Maithili, my cousins speak Hindi, my coaching teachers speak Maithili and Nepali even in English class and we do not know how to write in English.*" These responses from students, turned out to be my research leads which I framed as: Why is it that the secondary-level students are not proficient in free writing?

As writing is an essential part of learning on the part of the students because the marks allocated for the writing section has more weightage than other skills viz. listening, reading, and speaking, this was a pressing issue for me. Moreover, the national examination board, Curriculum Development Centre

(CDC), question papers have multiple writing tasks. I decided to explore on my students' writing for the EAR.

Introduction to exploratory action research

Exploratory action research is "a way to explore, understand and improve our practice as a teacher and acting on those findings to improve the situation" (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018). It "refers to stepping back from the present situation and beginning to take a careful look at one problem at a time and spend some time trying to understand the problem itself rather than acting quickly to solve it" (Smith & Rebolledo, 2015).

Teachers face difficulties while dealing with multilingual students with various social backgrounds. If they use action research particularly exploratory action research to address the classroom challenges, they not only understand the problems, but can solve them by themselves. By planning, exploring, analysing and reflecting upon the collected data, teachers can create knowledge themselves and for others as well. Inspired by this idea, I also used exploratory action research to solve my classroom puzzle.

Research questions

I thought of carrying out EAR to overcome my classroom challenges and selected these research questions to explore the classroom issue.

1. Why are my students confused about free writing?
2. What are the main difficulties that the students face in writing tasks?
3. How can I motivate all the students to write without any clues?
4. What techniques can be useful to improve their writing?

How did I explore my research issue?

At first, I talked to the headteacher of my school about my involvement in the EAR. I asked him for support in exploring my research questions. He was positive about my plan. I was energised when he gave his permission to carry out the EAR and promised to help me with any resources. Though I had seen the problem in all secondary level classes, I selected grade nine for the exploration. I used three techniques to explore my issue:

- a. *Journal writing*
- b. *Students' interview*
- c. *Writing activities (paragraph writing, story writing, diagram description etc.)*

During one of my classes with grade nine, I had an informal talk with the students about their writing. I casually shared my plan with the class. In the end, I made a formal announcement regarding the

research for the improvement of their writing skills. I told them how to write a journal daily. Then, I presented the questions prepared for them to collect their ideas and concerns. (see Appendix). Similarly, I discussed writing-skill based activities as indicated in their Secondary Education Examination (SEE) by the Ministry of Education.

Let's answer this question.

How did Rima deal with the free writing in her students?

What did I find?

During the discussion with the students, I observed that they were quite interested in journal writing. They seemed quite motivated towards writing when they were assigned to write with an instruction '*Write something interesting that happened with you this morning that you want to share with your friends*'. They wrote some sentences without hesitation though they made some mistakes, like ungrammatical sentences and repeated sentences. They appeared very excited to do the writing-skill based activities for two major reasons a) to pass the exam with better marks and b) to express their feelings in English in an organised way.

I found them using transliteration when they couldn't find the exact words for their interpretation. Sometimes, they included words from Maithili, their mother-tongue, and sometimes Nepali, their national language. It indicated that they were poor in vocabulary and couldn't express their feelings in the English language. While I had an informal talk with all the students, I found that they were interested in learning but did not get ample opportunity to learn i.e. exposure to English language learning. So, I made a plan to enable free writing for their learning purpose and also helping them to pass the examination with better marks.

Out of the 35 students, 28 students of grade nine wrote a 'Journal' daily with an interest and seven students wrote irregularly. The writings were not grammatically correct; the same ideas were repeated. Likewise, Nepali and Maithili words were included in their writing:

I feel *bechhaini* in the evening. (*Not well* - Maithili)

My father *le gali garnuvo*. (*scolded* - Nepali)

While writing a paragraph, the students did free writing on their topic. It was found that they selected topics from different sectors such as sports (cricket), social issues, politics, technology (internet, mobile), him/herself, family, and education. They showed an interest in various fields. Likewise, when they were asked to write a story, they did not complete it. 50% of the students did not write a title, 80% of them did not write the body, and no one wrote the moral of the story. Moreover, the students felt it was difficult to describe the given diagrams.

Plan for action

I had a second meeting with the school principal. We talked about the EAR and student participation in different writing activities, namely Journal writing, writing-skill-based activities such as paragraph writing, story writing, and chart-description. For the sake of those activities, 35 regular students of Grade nine were selected and had an informal talk with them about their improvement in the writing skills. At first, I planned to collect their interest in writing before making them practise different writing activities. For this, I made students write a paragraph and story in group and individually. Moreover, I gave them individual writing tasks in describing different charts, like pie-chart, bar graph, table chart etc..

The following timetable shows the writing activities.

S.N.	Activities	Days	Progressive timeline
1.	Journal Writing	20	Sep 16 - Oct 6
2.	Students' Interview	05	Sep 20 - Sep 24
3.	Writing Activities		
	a. Paragraph Writing	10	Sep 16 - Oct 29
	b. Story writing	15	
	c. Chart-description	15	

Table 1. Time period for Exploratory Action Research

Let's answer these questions.

What action plans did Rima design to help her students improve their free writing skills?

How were her plans aligned with what she explored in the earlier phase?

Implementation of my plans for actions and the outcomes

I selected the same Grade nine with 35 regular students to implement my plans for the EAR. The students were involved in a variety of activities. These activities and the actions are described separately below.

Journal writing

All the selected students of grade nine were told to write a journal daily for 20 days. In the beginning, it was very difficult to make them write, but slowly they were convinced when I showed the written sample of my own. The students were instructed to write without any hesitation of committing mistakes. They showed me their writing and I gave them motivational remarks without any correction. No negative comments were made on their writings nor were any marks given.

Students' interview

All 35 students of grade nine were interviewed as a single group in their classroom . Their responses for a list of questions were recorded.

Writing activities

The Students were asked to write a paragraph on their topic of interest. They were free to choose on whatever they liked to write. 30 minutes was allocated for this writing activity. At the same time, I did not help them in any way, but they were free to take the help from their classmates if necessary. They looked happy and devoted in writing. I attributed their zeal on free writing. Finally, I collected their writing papers saying, "Your effort is praiseworthy."

The next day, they were asked to write a story that they had heard somewhere. They tried their best to write. This time I helped some of them to write complete sentences, but they were instructed about negligence of grammaticality, word used etc. their story writing papers were collected.

Likewise, the next day, the same students were asked to describe a pie-chart given in the practice book of Grade nine. A model of diagram description was presented as a guideline. I asked them to take the help for the oral presentation. I collected their diagram descriptions when everyone completed their task.

In this way, the students of grade 9 were given three different writing activities similiar to their board examination. I thought of making them write in a better way to some extent. So, I planned to go thoroughly in the following way.

Paragraph writing

I asked the students to think about some interesting topics and listed them on the whiteboard. The number of topics was limited to five. In the beginning, I wrote some topics related vocabularies on the whiteboard and made them create word web. No explanations were made. It was carried out for five days. Then, the created word webs were explained. I helped them explain when needed. Altogether, I spent 10 days for paragraph writing.



Figure 1. A student's sample of word web creation on 'Janakpurdham'

Story writing

For story writing, I explained three parts of the story i.e., title, body, and moral. I then described how the 'body' is written and gave them one story each day to write in their classroom. This was done continuously for 15 days. Group work was conducted for 10 days and individual writing work for 5 days. In due course, they had to share their ideas and positive comments were given for further improvement.

Chart description

Individual work was carried out for the chart description. At first, I gave them a list of sentences about 'how to initiate description constructively'. They were then assigned to describe bar-graphs, pie-charts, and tables for 15 days. I found out that most students could describe the charts.

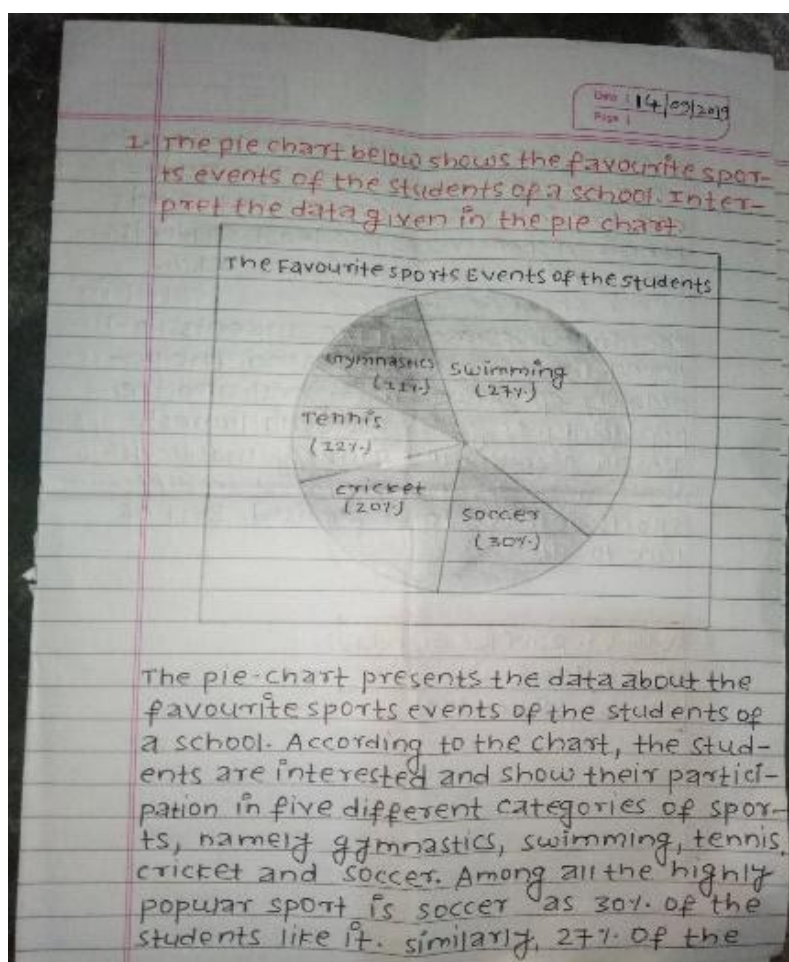


Figure 2. A student's sample writing of pie-chart description on
'The favourite sports events of the students'

Let's answer these questions.

- How did Rima run the activities? Did she run them as she planned? Or did she make any changes on the way?

Outcomes

On the whole, the EAR was carried out for 40 days. It was found that the students who did not have an interest in writing activities also started to write paragraphs, stories, essays, and chart description. As a result, 95% of the students wrote answers related to story writing questions; they had written title, body, and moral as well in the second terminal examination held on 6 December 2019. I found out that students' writing skills improved along with their habits. They were not hesitant as before. But they still needed more practise to improve the quality of their writing. However, the writing activities still needed regular practise.

Think about the following questions before reading further.

- Who did Rima collaborate with in implementing her plan?
- What were the changes she got after implementing her plans for change?
- Was the issue fully solved? What does she say about what could not be achieved?

Conclusion

In due course of the action research, I realised that I should conduct these types of activities in grades 8 and 10 too so that they could improve their writing skills. Likewise, I realised that if the care and attention towards the students' learning and their difficulties are given and the lessons are planned and organised in a systematic way, a teacher can bring a lot of changes in the classroom. Going through the research under the proper guidance of EAR, I have learned the following things:

- a) Teachers can do many things to improve their students.
- b) The EAR can help find solutions to many classroom issues.
- c) EAR helps teachers in organising their teaching ideas.
- d) Students can learn better when their interests are taken into consideration and teachers are cooperative.
- e) The students can learn freely when they are not put under pressure.
- f) Classroom sharing is a great effort for better learning.
- g) School Administration are generally in favour of the teacher when research is carried out for the improvement of students.

Appendix

Questionnaire administered for the students during EAR

S.N.	Questionnaire	Yes	No
1.	Are you interested in writing English? Why? a. It is a worldwide language. b. It is fast to write. c. It has mathematical evaluation in examination. d. Sometimes the topic is interesting.		
2.	What is difficult while writing? a) Grammar b) Vocabulary		
3.	Do you want to translate from Nepali to English? Why? a. It is easy to remember the words. b. We get help to write. c. We can keep it for long term remembrance.		
4.	How do you feel while writing a task is assigned to you? a. Classwork b. It is interesting because we get help from teachers at school. c. Homework d. It is less interesting because no one guides at home for writing English.		
5.	Do you want to develop your writing?		
6.	What do you think to be added to make your writing easy? a. We need a lot of English exposure at class and school premise too. b. We need to practise English writing exercises. c. Reference books should be made available. d. The same teacher is needed on a regular basis.		

Why do my Students Lack Interest in Creative Writing?

- Saloni Nhemafuki

(saloni.nhemafuki@gmail.com)

Pointers for pondering

Think about these questions before you proceed to the research story presented by Saloni Nhemafuki.

- Do you think creative writing is useful for English language learners? How do you think it is useful?
- How would you react when your students are not showing any interest in creative writing?
- How do you teach creative writing? What strategies would you use to arouse your students' interest in it?

Introduction

I am Saloni Nhemafuki, originally from Bhaktapur and currently living in Kathmandu. It has been nearly eight years since I started my teaching journey as an English Teacher. Currently, I am working in National Creative Co-educational School (NCCS) which is located in Chandol, Kathmandu. I have been working here since 2017 A.D. I usually spend my free time reading books and cooking. I enjoy reading and travelling.

Background

From the day I started teaching, I have faced challenges in making my students write. Writing is a work that consumes time and requires ideas. I found out that they usually wrote the basic exercise questions given in the book because the answers were available, or they received help from others. I wanted to understand why their writing was not good and not up to the mark though they answered the questions. I presumed that they faced difficulty in writing but forced them to write. I started giving them more interesting topics, and I separated a day for creative writing. However, there was no improvement. I could not decide what was happening until one day I shared my feelings with a colleague. She said to me, "Have you ever asked the kids whether they want to write?" She added, "Did you talk to them about what type of topic they like to write on?" These questions haunted me because the answer was "No". I just thought there were some problems and I started to work to find the solution. Then, I talked to my students about their lack of interest in creative writing. Most of them initially said that they liked

their creative writing class. Later, I told them about my experience and their performance. They finally revealed that they sometimes did not understand the topic, or they did not know how to start, or they eventually ended up copying each other's writings. Then I said to them, "Do you guys lack interest in writing anything or just on the topics related to creative writing?" Though I got mixed answers related to their likes and dislikes, I ended up with a decision that this was the area which I needed to research- "Lack of interest of the learners in creative writing."

My research questions

In search of solutions to the problems, I noticed my students losing or lacking interest in creative writing, I set the following questions for my study:

1. Why are my students lagging in creative writing?
2. How can I make them realize that writing is equally important to enhance their English speaking and reading?
3. How can I encourage my students to write?
4. How can I make my creative writing class more effective?
5. What are some of their interest areas or topics in writing?

How I explored my research issue

I asked my students about their interest areas, and asked them to write the topics they would like to write on. I also made a few school teachers observe my classes. They were very helpful and suggested that I elaborated and discussed on the topic comprehensively. However, they also noted that it could help students if I shared ideas on the topics and let students present their ideas.

Sometimes I wrote along with my students that helped me relate with them and they were curious to hear what I had written. They became open in sharing their writings.

Since I gave them time and word limit and told them that they did not need to bother with grammatical errors, they somehow wrote up to the word limit. However, a few of them could not think of a proper beginning to write.

I asked my teaching colleagues also to review my students' writings. They said that the topics were very interesting. I also realised that my students lacked interest in actual writing which was the most challenging part. This is what needed a solution. Lack of interest and lack of proper knowledge made them uninterested in creative writing.

I decided to explore further. I started to look for ideas on the internet and also watched YouTube videos which were equally helpful. Now, another challenge for me was to implement what I was researching. I always wanted the solution fast so sometimes I got demotivated when things did not work. I ended up joining the Exploratory Action Research (EAR) Project which I had heard from one of my friends.

The EAR gave me hope of getting at least an idea to understand my issue and trying what I can do from my side.

In this process, I got a full support from my school. They gave me the materials I required and gave me enough time to research my classroom issues. Similarly, I am blessed that I have got such supporting colleagues who not only supported me but also gave me ideas at times and morally helped me to get into the issue and understand it. Another important factor of my research was my students, who always did what I told them to do. They shared what they felt which helped me throughout my research.

Let's answer this question.

What did Saloni do when she noticed that her learners were not interested in creative writing?

What did I find?

Researching on creative writing was itself a challenge for me. I was not able to find out where to start first so like any other teacher, I started looking for the solution on the Internet. I felt that I might not have been teaching writing properly, and I also regretted not having enough time to teach writing. I found ideas and information on Google search but they did not really work. Upon reflecting why I was not successful, I realised that I needed to be in my students' shoes to understand them. So, I started talking to my fellow teachers about my problem and I got to know that they are facing a similar problem. They observed my class where they said, "Your children seem really passive." They added, "You need to talk to them." Their feedback helped me take further action on my plan. So, I started talking and taking their favours. Previously, I felt awkward but later I realised that they were happy helping and they were trying to implement some of their feedback. Eventually, it turned out to be a team effort for me which helped all of us.

I found out that I needed to be more patient with my students because until they cooperated with me, my research would be worthless. I needed them to understand that I had to be their friend and a teacher. Before I help them, I need to know whether they wanted to be helped or not. They also needed to tell me if they did not understand my instructions. I had to make the classroom environment interesting and stress-free. I found out that somewhere I was still following the traditional one-way teaching method where I talked and they listened to it. I needed to reverse it and let them speak or share their ideas instead.

In short, the students these days are completely different than what we used to be. They hate being compared to, and instead they could be told the past tales and their consequences and leave them to decide what they were up to and what their potentials were.

Most importantly, I found out that students are mature enough for their age to decide what's right and

what's wrong. So, we should always allow them to decide rather than deciding for them and telling them what to do and what not to do. Giving them freedom helped to improve their situation. This was the way I kept myself in their shoes. From this exploration, I got the following insights:

1. Talk and share solves 25% of the problem.
2. Be flexible with the students.
3. Try developing interest in the students.
4. Use and reuse the ideas. Sometimes the same idea which failed previously can perfectly work for the second time.
5. Be patient. The results are going to be sweet if you wait patiently.
6. Most importantly improvise yourself to improve others.

What were my plans for actions?

The planning for my EAR project began when I started thinking about the inadequacy in my students and me. In order to get results on any issue, we need to find the actual issue first. I had lots of issues going on in my mind, but I knew that I can't get a solution to all of my problems at the same time. I could definitely can start with one. So, I decided on one issue and that was the 'Lack of interest in creative writing'.

My plan included:

1. Getting help from other teachers on making students realize how important writing is to make spoken English better.
2. Encouraging students to write in any way they want, and with no grammatical barriers.
3. Giving word criteria to the students to write.
4. Providing them different materials to write rather than just paper and pen (Like colour paper, origami, crafts to be prepared and writing about it)

I approximately made the above plan after the EAR webinars. I slowly started working on my plan step by step. During the plan-making process I thought of many things to apply and was excited to implement. while making plans, I forgot that the area where I was working was completely dynamic and I got lots of challenges at every step.

Very few students talked to me and shared their study behaviours. I wanted my students to write as much as they could by following the instructions. I wanted them to share their thoughts on writing. I also planned to make my class interesting enough so that the students would wait for the creative writing class rather than feeling bored.

Let's answer these questions.

What action plans did Saloni design to help students to develop an interest in creative writing?
How were her plans aligned with what she explored earlier?

Implementation of my plans and the outcomes

For me, the first challenge was to find out what my issue was, after that how to find the solution. when I got some possible solutions, I encountered another challenge of implementing them. I desperately needed the solution to my issue for which I initially worked a lot and later found out some techniques which helped me implement my plans and get the desired outcomes from them. The techniques that I used along with their outcomes are described below:

First Technique: Group Division and Discussion

Before asking them to write, I started discussing the topics. I told them what I felt about the topics and the writing, and asked them to share their thoughts. I decided not to force them to share thinking that they might stop speaking and writing. I announced that anyone could volunteer, and that made a few students share their thoughts. I eventually ended up creating groups where they worked together. This first step helped me bond with my students.

Second Technique: Making them write the list of topics of their choice

I asked them to think about the topics on which they would like to write. They were excited to write the topics rather than writing essays. Here I found out that they were mostly interested in writing about games, food, friends, etc as most of them wrote the topics related to these areas.

Third Technique: Writing with them

I knew that being in their shoes was not an easy task, but I dared to try it with my next technique i.e. writing with them. During this stage, I not only wrote with them but the criteria I gave them were the same for me. This technique gave the most interesting results. Here I found out that most of the students were writing with me. I tried this technique with all the students that I was working with. I found the desired results with one particular class i.e. Grade 7.

Fourth Technique: No grammatical barriers

When I talked with one of my students, he mentioned, “I am afraid that I’ll make mistakes while I write and I usually make mistakes. So better I write less.” I got similar answers from many of his classmates.. Grammar will ultimately be taught but they needed to write, and I told them they would not have any grammatical barriers and they were free to make as many mistakes because they would also learn from their mistakes. This encouraged a few other students to start writing.

Fifth Technique: Sharing

This technique is related to my third technique as I had a better bonding with my students. Here they not only wrote but also shared what they wrote they were mostly excited because their teacher was also going to share with them. Most students not only wrote but finished writing within the amount of time because they wanted to share their work. This method helped me to get emotionally attached to my students as they shared their personal stories. This helped them understand their friends. This is by far my favourite technique.

Sixth Technique: Using music as a tool

Though I use this technique rarely, this is also another helpful technique. I played some mild music when they wrote which helped them concentrate. This technique might not work with everyone as some of my students later told me that music sometimes distracted them, but it did work in my case.

Let's answer these questions.

How did Saloni run the activities? Did she run them as she planned? Or did she make any changes on the way?

Outcomes

I started with the confusion in my head, with just the problems I was facing. My research undertaking helped me become calmer, patient, and gain perseverance. I actually had a good productive year with the help of each webinar that I participated in and the presentation I gave. I learned many things, like I had a better perspective on myself and my students. It helped me change the way I usually teach, I found new friends in my students, I got confidence in facing the problem and tackling them throughout the year with the EAR Team. They helped me learn how to research and find a specific solution. I needed to understand my students before I taught them anything. I not only got a solution on my issue but also became closer to my students through this valuable EAR work.

Moreover, I learned to share with strangers. I am not good at it, but I am trying my hardest. The techniques I developed may have their limitations. I still have challenges but I'm not going to stop researching, firstly for myself and secondly for my students. I will keep on trying with the dynamic nature of my classroom issues as well as my students.

I reserved 45 minutes a week for creative writing task and I saw improvement in my students' writing as they produced poems, stories, essays, letters, pictorial stories, character sketches, etc. This made me happy. Another thing that made me ecstatic was my students' enthusiasm towards writing. They started looking forward to the creative writing class on Mondays

Let's answer these questions.

- Who helped Saloni in the implementation process Saloni? How did they help her?
- What were the changes she got after implementing her plans for change?
- Was the objective met? What was the most satisfying for her?

Conclusion

In due course of this research, I realised that I should conduct these types of activities more frequently so that the students could improve their writing skills. Likewise, if I continue exploring as my issue itself is dynamic, I will get some desired results. I, as an English teacher, can change the perspective of students towards writing by a simple effort where I learn, and I teach. This would bring a huge change in the life of my students, and perhaps one of my students would become a world-famous writer one day. Going through the research under the proper guidance of EAR team, I learned the following things:

- a) It is important to try out the ideas.
- b) I had a lot of issues in my mind while the students did not respond to any answers, but EAR helped me to find out the solutions to them.
- c) I learned the proper process of research and properly organising the results.
- d) Cooperation and consideration can make better students and a better teacher.
- e) If students are provided with a stress-free environment where there is no pressure, the output we get from them is of more quality.
- f) Making students share their work through any method like class sharing or assembly sharing can build up their confidence.
- g) The equal effort of both management and teachers can enhance the quality of education.

I will always be working on the issue and trying new technique as comes my way. I will never stop sharing my experiences and learn from my seniors, juniors, and mentors. After all, I can only become a good teacher when I become a good learner.

I will learn, explore, plan, implement and research.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Questions for Students

1. Do you think writing specifically creative writing is important?
2. What are the factors that deprive you of writing potentially?
3. What do you think can be the motivating factors for writing in English?

Appendix 2. Interview Questions for Teachers

1. Do the students like writing in your class?
2. What are the major challenges you faced while making the children write?
3. What types of topics do you think students would get attracted to before writing?
4. Why don't students write more than a paragraph especially when asked to write essays or stories?
5. How can we encourage students to write?
6. Do you think speaking in English automatically helps in writing?
7. Is it good or bad to judge the students based on the amount of their writing?
8. What can be the practical solution of the students not writing in class?
9. Do you think time plays a vital role in creative writing?

Appendix 3. A story by one the students from Grade 7

1. The students were given some situation to write the story. This particular student chose this situation to develop a story from:
2. Character: a restaurant owner or manager
3. Setting: an expensive restaurant
4. Time: after a big meal
5. Situation/Challenge: a death has occurred

A night to remember

It was a huge and fancy night. People were dancing and enjoying themselves. The manager was running hastily to make sure that the arrangements were proper. He wanted everything to be perfect as it was his sister Veronica and her husband John's first anniversary.

Suddenly the music stopped, the lights went out and there was a strange silence. After about a minute, the music continued, and the people thought it was just a power cut.

Now it was time for the fancy dinner. Everyone took their seats. Then John proposed a toast, "To my beautiful wife, Veronica." With a bit of pride in his voice.

After the dinner John and Veronica started dancing. Out of the blue, John was unconscious and fell to the ground. Everyone murmured in shock and suspicion. Veronica started crying, and her brother Samuel called the ambulance. Everyone present there was asked to go home.

Veronica and Samuel were waiting outside the operation theatre. The doctor came out and said, "Sorry but Mr. Smith is dead." Veronica and Samuel were crying.

The next day, there was a funeral arranged for John. His coffin was made with the finest and most expensive wood. Everyone was at the funeral.

It was time for Veronica's speech. She delivered her speech sobbing, "John was the best, I loved him very much. I had never thought this day would come..."

BANG!

John pushed the lid of the coffin and said, "Surprise, Veronica! You wanted to see me dead, didn't you?"

Everyone was in shock and confusion. The children started shouting, "GHOST! GHOST!"

John reached to the podium and explained everything. Veronica and Samuel tried to kill me by poisoning me. But before they could do it, I threw the poisoned food, Veronica, you never loved me, all you loved was my mom..."

Veronica took out a gun and pointed it at John. She tried to shoot him.

(GUNSHOT)

The pistol hit Veronica's arm and when she looked back, it was the police.

"Veronica and Samuel, you are under arrest for attempt to murder."

Lack of Confidence in my Learners

- Sanjeev Kumar Singhal
(sanjeev22376@gmail.com)

Pointers for pondering

Think about these questions before you proceed to the research story presented by Sanjeev Kumar Singhal.

- What would you do if you find low confidence in speaking English in your learners?
- What are your general techniques for teaching speaking skills in the English language classroom?
- Do you consider your students' background in evaluating their performance?

Introduction

My name is Sanjeev Kumar Singhal and I teach English in the secondary level at Mahendra secondary school, Nepalgunj, Nepal. It is a government-funded school where I have been teaching since 2002. Generally, there are around 50 - 60 students in each class. I conducted the Exploratory Action Research (EAR) in Grade nine. There were 55 students in the class.

Background

My school is located in a town of mid-western southern plains where most of the students come from Madhesi, Muslim, Tharu, and local Nepali communities. Teaching in such a diverse class is a challenging job. As is said a strong building lies on its strong foundation; teaching English would have been easier if their base had been stronger. So my research is based on how to improve their confidence in order to fill those gaps that impede these students from speaking fluent English.

My research questions

These questions guided my exploration of the research issue.

1. What do I know about the learners and their family background?
2. How often do I involve my learners in pair works, group works, and individual works?
3. How often do I give time to my learners and understand their issues and help them?
4. What specific ways can I adopt in my classroom to build the confidence in my learners?

How did I explore my research issue?

Writing skills play an important role in the academic performance of the students. Moreover, there was no research available on their speaking skill proficiency. due to the lack of any interaction programmes, I needed to create an open and inviting environment in the classroom for a free discussion in order to maintain a healthy teacher-student relationship that could make it easier for me to understand their psychology and the way these young minds perceive things. documentation was essential criteria to reflect on their performances. Since all these had been happening at a small scale, basic record-keeping methods and research instruments could be the most effective ways to begin the quest for confidence building.

To conduct my exploration, my colleagues from other subjects were asked to monitor the class for feedback. As EAR is a new way of finding problems and their solutions to address learners' performance, it was highly discussed with SMC and Headteacher for support. In order to explore the situation, I planned to use two techniques.

- a) Informal Discussions: First of all, class discussion and idea-sharing with students was conducted regarding the roles, activities, and project work. Finally, opinion sharing activities were conducted with fellow teachers and the headteacher.
- b) Questionnaire: A questionnaire having closed and open-ended questions regarding their family background, age, gender, interest, problems and their expectations, activities they wish to participate in were prepared. (See Appendix)

The institution where I worked was supportive of this exploratory research. They were ready to provide the printouts required to conduct this survey. The school management committee showed a positive response in conducting parents' teachers and student's interaction programme. The colleagues were helpful in a way that they were ready to observe the class and provide the feedback. Their feedback was focused on sitting arrangements, paying attention to all the students rather than focusing on some students with timely reinforcements.

Let's answer this question.

- A. How did Sanjiv explore when he noticed that his learners did not show confidence in speaking?
- B. How did he explore their background? Why do you think he collected such data?

What did I find?

After analysing data, I found out that nearly 20% of the students got parents' support in solving problems in subject matters because of their low educational background as well as their negligence. Nearly 70% of them liked English subject because of its global importance though the majority of them were very weak in the language competency. Likewise, only 60% of them used cell phones for

learning, 70% liked to work in groups, 60% had the internet access at home. In classroom activities, 70% of the students liked to use their mother tongue.

These data showed that students needed parents' support as well as judicious use of mother tongue for those struggling in English. Likewise, they liked to work in groups. For making the classroom lively, teaching with digital tools would be effective to engage the learners.

Plan for action

I planned some activities to develop my learner's confidence. Student's interaction programmes were planned, such as storytelling activities in the class. Short conversations and dialogues were prepared on different general issues. Loud and silent reading activities were encouraged where the students' pronunciations were observed. Vocabulary enhancing activities were planned for the students as they lack the words while speaking. Use of digital devices like cell phones and audio devices like Bluetooth speakers were used. Speaking activities were planned to enhance the learners speaking competency. Those who were not able to speak even the basic-level English were allowed to do so in their mother tongue and then discussion was done in the English language. Students were involved in a Facebook students group created by a teacher. In my class, learners were mixed abilities so I planned to gradually uplift my learners from silent or receptive level to advanced fluency. I started the lessons with the students' comfort zone. They were encouraged to introduce themselves in peer groups describing what they like and dislike.

Let's answer these questions.

- A. What action plans did Sanjiv design to help students improve their confidence level?
- B. How were his plans aligned with what he explored earlier?

Implementation of the plan

Students were first allowed to open up and speak about themselves in the class. This was necessary as many of them had never been given a chance to speak in front of the class. After this, they were divided into groups so that they could know about their classmates, the way they thought and enjoyed learning in the class. The groups divided were given poster preparation activities to be done in a week. Before starting formal lessons, ice-breaking activities were planned like short storytelling, recent activities they did, most memorable events, etc.



Figure 1. Poster created by students

As students' speech largely depended on their reading habits, they were allocated certain texts to be read aloud and silently as required. For those students who felt uncomfortable while reading aloud correctly in the class, they were encouraged to read something related to the textbook or their interest at home and keep a record with their parents' signature. Such activities gave them the confidence that they were working for it.

The first and foremost responsibility of any teacher is to make students feel comfortable in the class to make them open enough to ask questions, raise queries, and clear doubts. This was possible only when the students do not feel left out in the class. So, all the students were asked to prepare one story or joke, and they were to tell that randomly at any day or at any time of the class when asked. This activity acted like a magnet to the students' confidence.

Day	Date	Time	UNIT	Number	Not understanding word	Parent Signature	Teacher Signature
01	2076 06 01	02 to 03	Reading Book	9804553904	misunderstanding	misunderstanding	
02	2076 06 02	03 to 04	Reading Book	9804553904	misunderstanding	misunderstanding	
03	2076 06 03	04 to 05	Reading Book	9804553904	misunderstanding	misunderstanding	
04	2076 06 04	05 to 06	Reading Story	9804553904	misunderstanding	misunderstanding	
05	2076 06 05	06 to 07	Reading essay	9804553904	misunderstanding	misunderstanding	
06	2076 06 06	07 to 08	Reading Book	9804553904	misunderstanding	misunderstanding	
07	2076 06 07	08 to 09	Reading Book	9804553904	misunderstanding	misunderstanding	
08	2076 06 08	09 to 10	Reading Book	9804553904	misunderstanding	misunderstanding	

Figure 2. Student's reading record

Now, with the permission of the school authority, traditional methods of learning were replaced by modern teaching methods. Students were allowed to use mobile phones to search for difficult words and meaning in the class, watch moral stories, short educational documentary movies, and keep a record of the class activities. It was obvious not every student learns at the same place at the same time, this was very effective for those students who didn't understand the lessons quickly they could watch the class in a loop on their mobile. They were allowed to record their performance while storytelling or reading so that they could compare the same with the performance of the next day. They were encouraged to seek permission from their parents for the same thing.

For those students who were not able to express themselves properly in English, I asked them to do the same in the language they felt comfortable with, and then the discussion was done in the English language. Because it was better to express and open up in any language than sit silently and not get involved in the class activities. This made them believe that everyone present there was rather ready to help them overcome their failings without being judgmental. After this, the students were asked to prepare and perform simple dialogues on different topics like shopkeeper and customer, doctor and patients, teacher and students talking about study, parents and children talking about exam preparation.

In a traditional way of teaching and learning, the students do not get enough chance to be familiar with native speaker pronunciation. For this, some YouTube educational videos and documentary films were shown with the help of digital devices like laptop and projector. For listening comprehension, Bluetooth speakers were used where students were assigned different tasks focusing on integrated

language skills. In this way, digital learning was introduced in the class.

In my experience, students seemed to enjoy quiz activities. They felt more involved in quizzes so online quizzes were conducted. Similarly to make them have access to various online learning methods and study materials, they were added to the Facebook students group created by the teacher.

Finally, to summarize all the activities in the classroom, the students were made to give reflections on the way they perceived the class, what they learned on that day, and how they were encouraged to set micro-goals for each day.

Let's answer these questions.

- How did Sanjeev run the activities? Did he run them as he planned? Or did he make any changes on the way?
- How did he use ICT in his research?

Outcomes and conclusion

My students were not initially interested in learning, and I tried various techniques to improve their confidence; however, I could not succeed. It was because I was trying the techniques that I thought were the best instead of following what the real need was. For example, I was using interesting reading materials to motivate the students in reading, but they were not interested in reading. When I explored the situation, I found out that the problem was not with the reading materials but it was with the language itself i.e. students had difficulties with word meaning and pronunciation. As I planned as per the need and interest of the students, then I got success. Now I realised that the techniques that we think the best may not improve our teaching, because the real problem or the need and interest of the students may be different; as a result, our best techniques may not work in that particular situation. With that, we need to shift the old traditional way of teaching and learning into the modern learning using different digital devices. So, I suggest, before we plan for any change, the exploration of the current situation to find out the real problem is essential for the right action to implement.

Let's answer these questions.

- Who did Sanjeev collaborate with while implementing his plan? Or did he run on his own? What support from other stakeholders would be useful in action plan implementation?
- What were the changes he got after implementing his plans for change?
- Was the issue fully solved? What suggestion did he give to other teachers?

Appendix

Survey

Name (Optional):

Grade:- 9

1.	Do you like to study English Subject	• Yes • No
2.	Do you understand the language of English teachers?	• Yes • No
3.	Do you use a cell phone for learning?	• Yes • No
4.	Do you like listening to stories in the class?	• Yes • No
5.	Do you get support in your study from your parents?	• Yes • No
6.	Do you like to study in groups or individuals?	• Yes • No
7.	Can you understand a Native English Speaker?	• Yes • No
8.	How do you feel when teachers allow you to use your mother tongue in the class?	• Feel comfortable • Like to express in English
9.	Do you have internet access at home? If yes, what purpose do you use the internet for? Write in at least 20 words.	• Yes • No Response

Why are my Students not Interested in Writing?

- Shanti Devi Sharma
(shanti.sharma1819@gmail.com)

Pointers for pondering:

- As an EFL teacher, what do you think about teaching writing to your students?
- What would you do if your students were not interested in writing activities?

Introduction

I am Shanti Devi Sharma. I have been teaching English as a second language for the last fifteen years. I have experience in teaching the English language from primary level to Bachelor level. Currently, I have been teaching English at Edify International School and Cambridge International College in Kathmandu, Nepal. I conducted my EAR at Edify International School. It is a private school with the teaching in English medium. I did this research with 15 students from Grade nine.

Background

As an English language teacher, I have seen the lack of class participation in writing tasks. Some students do such writing tasks independently and creatively, whereas others cannot write even after the regular support and guidance. They seem more willing to copy from their friends or any other sources instead of doing the task themselves.

When I joined Edify International School in 2019, I felt that most of the students of Grade nine showed little interests in writing activities in comparison to other grades. There were only 15 students, of which few were newly enrolled and had studied in government schools which generally have a low quality of English language education.

When I started teaching at the school, I observed that the students did not mind reading comprehension activities. When it came to writing their answers, they were not interested. When they were asked to write the answers from a passage, they copied what was given in the passage related to the question.

Even the students with better writing skills produce very little content when they were asked to complete board examination type free writing tasks, such as paragraphs, essays, stories, dialogues, letters, emails, brochures/leaflets, news articles, reviews etc.. Moreover, when they tried to write, they had a lot of problems in writing. These writing issues included proper organisation, coherence/cohesion, content

relevancy, grammatical accuracy, and creativity. I taught them components of guided and free writing. I even taught them the process of writing. I used mind mapping strategy to teach paragraphs and essays writing. However, no expected improvement was observed in the classroom. I could not find my students enjoying or participating these writing activities. As an English language teacher, it created a kind of moral pressure on me. It was my responsibility to help them learn. Therefore, I decided to explore the reasons why my students were lagging behind in writing.

Objectives of the study

I set the following as the objectives of this study:

- to explore why my students are not interested in writing; and
- to find out the difficulties of the students in writing; and
- to improve the writing skills of my students.

Plan for exploration

The national curriculum has allotted 35% weightage for the writing skills. It showed the significance of writing skills from the examination point of view. That was why I decided to make sure whether my students could perform in creative write. First of all, I wanted to know why they felt it challenging and disengaged to write. Then I had an informal conversation with my students to find out their problems in writing. They responded that writing skill was the most difficult skill for them among the four skills of language learning. Similarly, I discussed this matter with my colleagues. My colleagues shared a similar kind of experience.

After my communication with the students and teachers, I shared the problem with the school principal and asked for the permission to conduct the EAR on the issues with student writing. He consented to me and assured me that he would help me with my research needs. I wanted to explore:

1. Why is it that my students do not want to write?
2. What are the students' difficulties in writing?
3. How do the students take writing tasks?
4. How can I overcome the current situation?

Exploration methodology

Most of my students mentioned that they could not write because it was their most difficult skill among the four language learning skills. I wanted to know why it was difficult for them. Then I decided to have a small survey and prepared a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) for the students to decide whether they enjoyed writing; how did they think about their writing skill; whether they wanted to engage in creative write, and what were their difficulties in writing. Likewise, I requested two of my teaching colleagues to explore how the students took the writing lessons.

Data collection and interpretation

Most of my students responded that they enjoyed writing and all of them wanted to write even though they found writing tasks difficult. All of them said that vocabulary posed challenges in writing.

Do you enjoy writing?	Yes	A little	No
	53.33%	0%	46.67%
How do you think your writing skill is?	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
	6.67%	40%	53.33%
How do you feel when your teacher asks you to do any creative writing tasks	Happy	Worried	Difficult
	0%	26.67%	73.33%
Do you want to write creatively?	Yes	A little	No
	100%	0%	0%

Table 1. Survey result of exploratory stage

The above table shows that the majority of the students (53.33%) enjoyed writing even though most of them found it difficult when the teacher gave them writing tasks. Most of the students (53.33%) mentioned that they were poor in creative writing which showed that they had a negative attitude towards their ability. However, they still had interests creative writing. One open-ended question was asked to them to find out the reasons for their difficulty in writing. All of their answers indicated that vocabulary was the main reason for the difficulty in writing:

	Reasons of Difficulty	Code	Students
What makes you difficult in writing?	Don't know many words	Vocabulary	20%
	Spelling errors	Vocabulary	26.67%
	Lack of vocabulary power	Vocabulary	33.33%
	Don't remember the words while writing	Vocabulary	20%

Table 2. Codification of data

The table above demonstrates that all of my students felt difficulty in writing because they believed that they lacked vocabulary to engage in a writing task. 20% of my students stated in the survey that they did not know words that were necessary in a creative writing task. While 26.67% of them were worried about spelling errors, 33.33% of them confidently mentioned that they lacked in vocabulary. 20% of them thought that they could not recall the words while writing.

Peer observation

My students' reluctance to write had made me question myself about my teaching and classroom strategy. One question that I often asked myself was "Are my classroom strategies contributing to my students' writing problem?" Therefore, I invited two of my colleagues to observe my classes. I handed them an observation checklist (see Appendix 2) and asked them to answer some questions to check whether my activities were suitable for my students and to see whether the students were interested in writing tasks.

One of my colleagues said that students were confused while writing. They could not understand even the simple terms used in the mind map of the essay. They kept on asking the teacher to translate some Nepali words into English even to note down the ideas provided in the mind mapping. That showed that they had a limited vocabulary.



Figure 1. Peer Observation

My next colleague gave a similar opinion that the students seemed to be lacking the words in writing an essay. As a result, they could not do well though they were provided with sufficient guidance in a format draft of a formal letter. They were interested in it and asked questions to find the words they needed to use in their writing. My colleagues mentioned that the strategies were suitable but I needed to focus on vocabulary.

After analysing the collected data, I realised that my students were interested in writing. They wanted to practice writing skills, but they found it difficult due to a lack of vocabulary. I was surprised to learn that they enjoyed writing. Their enjoyment in writing and their interest in creative writing energised me to carry out this research.

Points for consideration

- Now that Shanti has established her reasons for students' lack of interest in writing, what do you think she should focus on to help her students write better?
- Do you think that Shanti will be able to help her students write better if she focused on vocabulary-related activities?

Plan for action

When I diagnosed the cause of my students' disengagement in writing, I knew where I needed to focus. I realised that it is neither my strategy nor the interest that needed the work. Much rather, the lack of vocabulary caused the problem in the writing skills of the students. So, I decided to teach new words along with the writing skills to the students. Then, I started online searching to find a better solution to my problems. I learned some useful ways to teach vocabulary at Pesce (n.d.). I remembered the ideas of the presenters in the NELTA conferences. After that, I planned to help the learners learn vocabulary and writing skill together by using the following strategies:

- Share one and learn 15 words a day
- Vocabulary games
- Teaching/eliciting vocabulary related to the topic before writing task
- Mind mapping before writing
- Vocabulary via audio-visual aids

Action for change***Share one and learn 15 words a day***

There were only 15 students in Grade 9. They started to share one new word with its meaning and sentences on the whiteboard every day. Since we had an hour-long period, I divided half an hour for this activity and the remaining half hour for a writing task. As I had wrapped up the school syllabus, we had sufficient time for improving their writing skills. The students excitedly took part in these activities. Sometimes, I would allocate the students to prepare the new words to be based on any topic so that it would be easier to write on the very topic. A lot of progress could be observed at the end of the month that students could write any kind of writing tasks without being stuck on vocabularies.

Vocabulary games

I guided my students to play various games. One particular game they liked the most was the one in which students were divided into two groups. One of the members of a group was called in front of the

class and kept on the hot chair which turned to the front. Then, I showed a word on a flashcard. The teacher should be sure that the student on the hot chair could not see the word. Now, the group whose member was on the hot chair should make him/ her guess the word shown by the teacher with the help of synonyms, antonyms, and meanings. If they could guess the word, the group scored a point. Then the next group continues. Similarly, they played 'guess what I am thinking' and 'Fill in the blanks (no options)'. With the help of these games, my students not only learned vocabulary but those who did not speak in English also started using English.



Figure 2. Students playing vocabulary games

Teaching/eliciting vocabulary related to writing topic

I taught vocabulary related to the topic before asking students to write on a topic. I frequently taught the words myself and sometimes through different vocabulary games. Sometimes, I elicited the words from the students. I divided half hour for teaching vocabulary and half hour for writing tasks, which worked. My students, who would not write a few sentences, started writing gradually. At the very beginning, they needed more guidance. Later, they slowly grew independent though some minor grammar errors were still there. Therefore, I will emphasised both grammar and vocabulary while giving them writing tasks after the winter vacation.



Figure 3. A student sharing vocabularies

Mind mapping before writing

Mind mapping is the best way in the brainstorming stage. Before writing a paragraph, an essay, a news article, or a movie/book review on any topic, one can generate information regarding a particular topic. The information is used later to write about the very topic. At the very beginning, my students used to think this is the teacher's material only, and they used to take it as an extra burden to do it. To be honest, I had to mind map myself while asking them to write. After engaging them in mind mapping activities before every writing activity, they realised it as a very useful tool, and they started mind mapping as soon as I wrote the topic on the board. They found it very easy. However, they sometimes needed guidance in mind mapping on the topic with which they were not familiar.

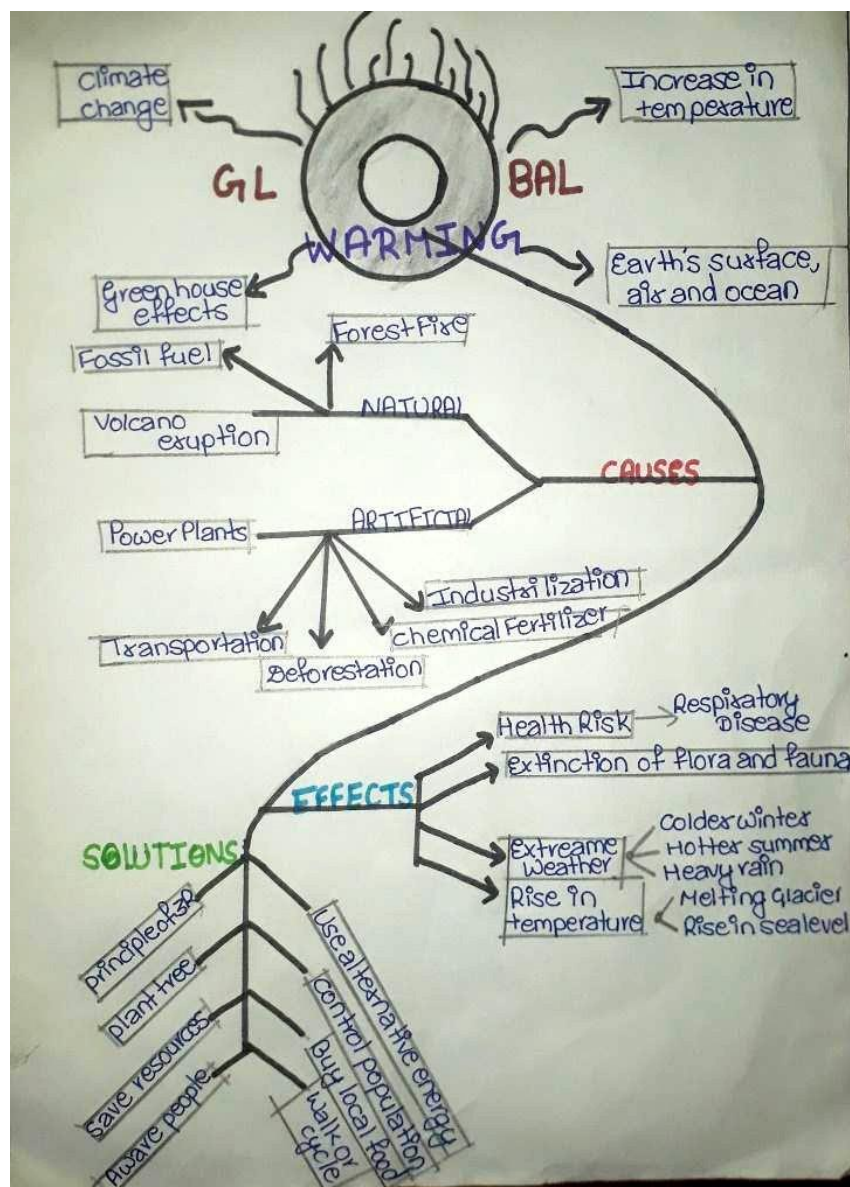


Figure 4. A student's sample mind mapping

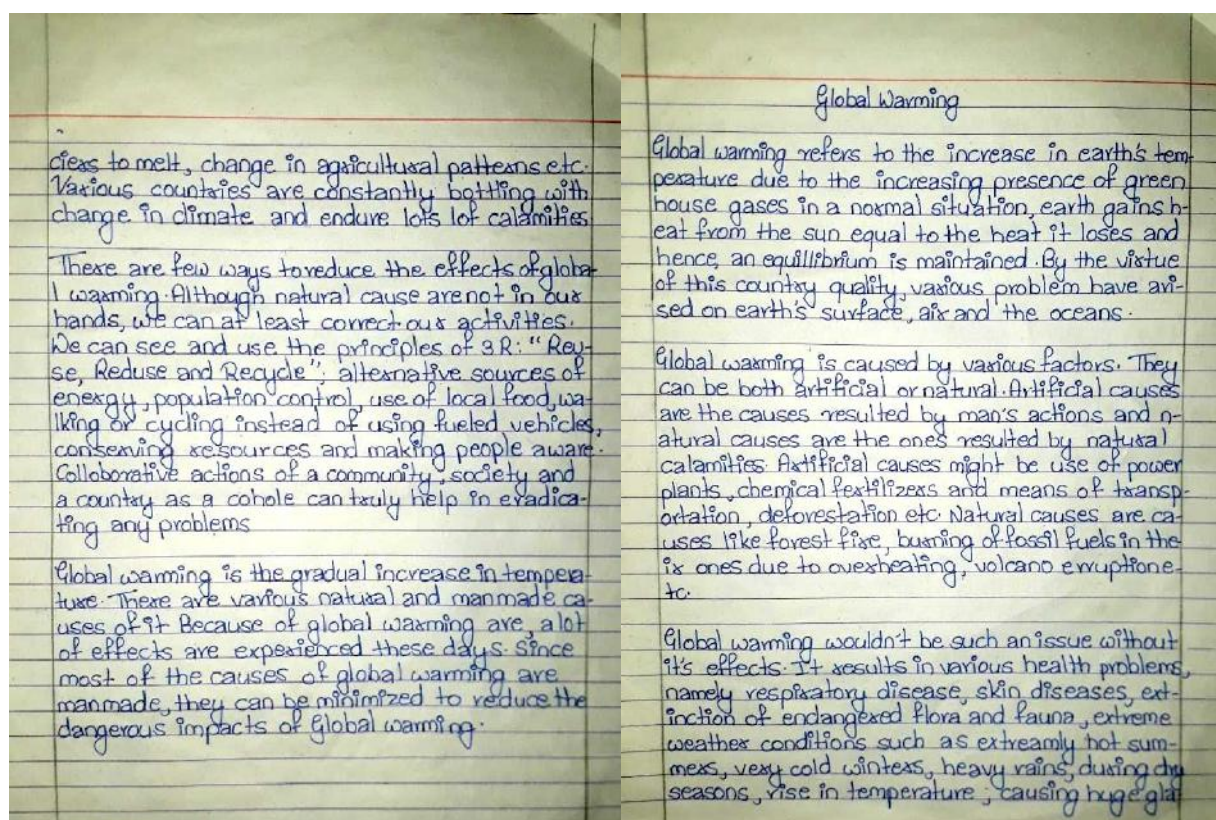


Figure 5. A student's sample writing after mind mapping

Vocabulary via audio-visual aids

We have a smart lab at our school. Teachers use audio-visual teaching aids for the students' better learning. I also used these tools to help my students learn listening and speaking skills. When I started 'action for change' I used these tools to teach vocabulary. My students most often watch vocabulary classes on YouTube. Also, I suggested watching English movies and videos at home for learning more vocabulary. My students said they enjoyed it very much. One of my students said, 'I often used to watch Hindi movies and videos, now I watch English videos. It's fantastic to learn with fun'.

Questions for you to consider

What do you think about Shanti's classroom strategies to help improve her students' writing?
Would you do anything differently if you were in Shanti's position?

After the action: observation

I found an unbelievable change in my students' writing skills after implementing the action for change. My students were very reluctant to write anything earlier, however, they enjoy writing now. They would not even expect any guidance from me now. They did not produce many sentences within a teaching period earlier. Now, they wrote a complete activity (essay, letter, story, or anything they are

asked) easily. Even the students with low English language competency, wrote although they still made grammar errors.

The following table shows the level of improvement:

	Yes	A little	No
Do you enjoy writing?	73.33%	20%	6.67%
How do you think your writing skill is?	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
	60%	40%	0%
How do you feel when your teacher asks you to do any creative writing tasks	Happy	Worried	Difficult
	73.33%	20%	6.67%
Do you want to write creatively?	Yes	A little	No
	100%	0%	0%

Table 3. Result of intervention

The above table shows that the majority of the students (73.33) fully enjoyed the writing activity, and 20% of them enjoyed it a little, whereas 6.67% still did not enjoy it. The students' attitude to evaluate themselves has been improved a lot. Most of them (60%) started to think themselves good in writing, and the remaining 40% thought that their writing skill was satisfactory, but none of them thought that he or she was poor like before. The majority of the students (73%) began to feel happy when their teacher gave them writing tasks, though 20% of them were still worried, and 6.67% felt difficulty in writing. Before starting this research, all of them were interested in creative write.

Reflection: Lesson learned

Before, my students showed their dissatisfaction when I ask them to write something. They would request me to write the answers to the questions on the board. I would urge them to write on their own, but they would end up copying from their books. asking them to engage in free writing would have been unthinkable. I applied different strategies that worked in other contexts. However, they did not work with the students. All of these made me feel that my students were not interested in writing. Exploration of issues changed my mind, and I decided to help them to learn vocabulary. I realised vocabulary had hindered their interest in writing.

A teacher starts thinking that there can be something wrong either with the teaching strategies or with students' interest when the students cannot perform well. However, the vocabulary of students might create problems in their writing skills. Teaching vocabulary before teaching any writing task is quite

useful for the students. Sometimes, only working with vocabulary is also very useful. Likewise, Mind mapping is fruitful to gather the information related to any topic which enables the planned writing. Vocabulary games are a very effective tool in that it provides a wide range of words for the students with fun and adequate team spirit. Moreover, if the students cooperate with their teachers attentively, bring drastic but positive changes could be expected in the students' writing.

Conclusion

Before exploring the problem, I felt that my students were not interested in writing. After the problem was explored, I came to learn that they were interested in writing. Despite poor vocabulary, they wanted to learn to write more creatively. When I identified that the problem is related to the lack of vocabulary, I started actions for change. I mainly emphasised on words using learning activities and strategies. Vocabulary games, teaching vocabulary before every writing task, regular sharing of vocabulary by students along with mind mapping, and teaching vocabulary through audio-visual aids brought a lot of changes to the students' attitudes and behaviours. Those who would not write started writing, and those who would think themselves poor started to think good about their writing skills.

This research gave me a valuable lesson. I used to worry about searching for a new strategy to improve my students' writing skills. Now, I have started to think about classroom issues, including writing from a different perspective. I have realised that vocabulary is an important aspect of language learning. Without sufficient vocabulary, students cannot do better in writing. We should not give up thinking that our students are not interested in any activities. If we try to find out the solutions to our students' problems and can cooperate with them, we can bring positive changes to them. This sort of challenging situation is not only in one class or institution. I used to suffer from this obstacle in other institutions too. I am excited about the success of changing action. Along with applying the solution found from this research, I am planning to take measures for solving the grammatical errors in my students' writing. I will start teaching grammar from a basic level.

Reference

Pesce, C. (n.d.) *Teaching English Vocabularies*. Busy Teacher. <https://busyteacher.org/2921-teaching-english-vocabulary-10-fabulous-ways-to.html>

Appendices

Appendix 1. Questionnaire administered for students during exploration

Student's Name (optional):

Class:

Read the following questions carefully and tick or write the answers.

1. Do you enjoy writing?
Yes A little No
2. How do you think your writing skill is?
Good Satisfactory Poor
3. How do you feel when your teacher asks you to do any creative writing tasks?
Happy Worried Difficult
4. Do you want to write creatively?
Yes A little No
5. What makes you difficult in writing?

Appendix 2. Observation Checklist provided to the teachers during peer observation

Purpose: The purpose of this observation guideline is to obtain a picture of my class on the basis of what activities I use and how do my students react to my way of teaching creative writing. This observation will be done by a colleague who teaches English. Finally, this peer observation will be used to reflect on why my students are not interested in creative writing.

Research Questions: To reflect on the students' interest in creative writing two questions are expected to be answered during the process of the research with the help and observation from a colleague. The questions are as following:

1. Why is it that my students do not write creatively?
2. How do my students take creative writing tasks?

While you observe the lesson, please answer thoughtfully the following questions related to the teacher and the students from 9th Grade.

1. What strategy does the teacher use for teaching creative writing? Is it suitable?

2. What do the students do while teaching?

3. How do the students participate while doing their writing task?

Feedback:

Observer's Sign

Appendix 3. Lesson Plan (before exploration)

Class: 9

Subject: English

Teaching Item: Letter Writing

School: E I S

Date: June 10, 2020

Time: 1 hour

Specific Objectives:

At the end of this lesson, the students will be able to:

- a) identify the parts of the formal letter
- b) write a formal letter

Instructional Materials:

word cards of parts of the letter

Instructional Strategies:

Engage:

The teacher will elicit what a formal letter is.

The teacher will brainstorm the reasons for writing a formal letter.

Study:

The teacher will paste the word cards written parts of the letter on the board to draw the format of a formal letter.

The teacher will describe what do the parts of the letter include such as heading includes writer's address and date; inside address includes to whom and where the letter is to be sent; salutation is a formal way of addressing a person which is written as 'Dear sir/ madam'; body part includes the reason or purpose of writing a letter; closing includes 'Respectfully, Sincerely' along with capital letter and comma; signature includes sign and name of a person. Then the teacher will link the parts with the examples.

Then the teacher will ask the students to draft a formal letter based on the parts and examples written on the board. Students will do it in groups, and the teacher will guide if necessary.

Activate:

The teacher will assign individual work. The students will write a letter to the newspaper editor complaining about the shortage of water in their city.

Evaluation:

The teacher may ask the following questions to evaluate the students:

- 1. Why is a formal letter written?
- 2. What are the parts of a formal letter?
- 3. How many paragraphs are usually written in the 'body' of a formal letter?

Homework

Write an application to the principal of your school requesting to buy some instruments for your science lab.

Lesson Plan (after exploration during intervention)

Class: 9

School: EIS

Subject: English

Date: Jan 10, 2020

Teaching Item: Essay Writing

Time: 1 hour

Specific Objectives:

At the end of this lesson, the students will be able to:

- a. learn some new words
- b. write an essay on global warming

Instructional Materials:

Ten flashcards with a word on each of them

Instructional Strategies:

Engage:

The teacher will start the lesson with a vocabulary game

She will divide the students into two groups. Each group will send one of their members to sit on a hot chair. The teacher will show one flashcard to the student. The member of the respective group will try to make the student sitting on the hot chair guess the word with the help of meanings, synonyms and antonyms. If s/he can guess the correct word the group will score marks.

Study:

The teacher will write ten more words on the whiteboard: temperature, industrialisation, deforestation, fertiliser, chemical, fossil, greenhouse, extinction, eruption and volcano

The teacher will elicit, explain these words and use them in sentences.

The teacher will make four categories: definition, cause, effect and solution and ask the students to mind map on global warming with the help of the words discussed in class.

Students will work in pair, and the teacher will facilitate them necessarily.

Then the teacher will revise the process of writing essays in short.

Activate:

Then the teacher will ask the students to write an essay based on the mind map. The students will write an essay individually.

Evaluation:

The teacher may ask the following questions to evaluate the students:

4. What is global warming?
5. How are we affected by it?
6. How do we conclude an essay?

Homework:

Read and write the vocabularies written on the board to share in the class tomorrow.

Increasing Reading Ability of Grade Four Students

- Suman Shrestha
(suman.srt@gmail.com)

Pointers for pondering

Think about these questions before you proceed to the research story presented by Suman Shrestha.

- What would you normally do or think when you find that your learners are struggling with their reading skills?
- What are your general techniques for teaching reading to your students?
- Does reading skill affect other three language skills? How?

Introduction

My name is Suman Shrestha and I am an English language teacher. I have been teaching English at different levels for more than 16 years. I have participated in the Fulbright Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program at the University of Northern Colorado, U.S.A, for 6 weeks in 2019 (Fall). I have also taught in the English Access Microscholarship Program sponsored by U.S. Embassy and managed by NELTA. Currently, I am teaching at Shree Siddha Baba Secondary School, Godawari-5, Kailali. I have been teaching in the same school since 2009. I teach students of grades 4, 5, 9, and 10. My students have diverse abilities and they come from different family backgrounds. There are around 500 students and 18 teachers altogether in the school. The majority of students studying in the school are from lower socio-economic backgrounds and their parents are illiterate. Only a few parents can help their children with their studies.

Background

As with most community schools in Nepal, the medium of instruction in my school is Nepali. All the subjects except English are taught in the Nepali language. Though I have been trying to teach English giving my best effort, I have not been able to see good results. Students' English language skills are far lower than expected by the curriculum. During my teaching in grade four, I noticed that most of the students in the class were struggling to read in English. Whenever I asked them to read, they seemed afraid. The situation made me worried. As I was thinking about how to improve their reading, I heard about the Exploratory Action Research (EAR) training course to run online. I applied for the course thinking that I could find some solution to improve the situation. To begin with I would work with

Grade 4 for the EAR purpose. I chose this class as the students were exposed to the new teaching environment. Up to grade three, they studied all subjects with a single teacher as the school followed Graded teaching system. From grade 4, they had a separate teacher for each subject. I thought that this class needed my attention.

Research questions

Before I made any intervention, I wanted to explore why my students had low reading ability. I set the following research questions for my study:

1. Why can my students not read even simple texts?
2. Can they recognize alphabets individually?
3. Can they read individual words?
4. How do they feel when they read loudly?
5. How can I support my students to overcome the problem of reading loudly?

Exploration of my research issues

During my teaching in grade four, I noticed that my students were struggling with reading text. Whenever I asked them to read aloud, only two or three students came forward voluntarily and the rest of the others tried to avoid their turn. This forced me to question their reading ability. To find out the root of the problem, I adopted the following methods:

- a) Close observation of the students reading ability
- b) Interview with the students
- c) Interview with their previous grade teacher

In the beginning, I started observing them closely. I asked them to recognize English alphabets randomly since it is very important for being able to read. Except for three students, all of them identified the letters easily. Then, my focus shifted to their ability to read individual words on the board. This time many of the students kept silent or pronounced incorrectly. They struggled to establish a relationship between letters and sounds. And the situation appeared more worrying when I asked them to read a paragraph in front of the class. I found many of the students were afraid to read in front of the class. So, comforting them, I allowed them to read from their seat. Even then, they had difficulty in reading the paragraph.

Along with the close observation of their reading ability, I selected some of the students for the interview and asked them about problems they faced while reading English. I recorded the information in a notebook. Similarly, I talked with the grade-teacher of class three about the students' problems and the way she used to teach English in her class. I even observed her current class to find her ways of teaching reading English. I came to know that she gave very little importance to the reading activities and she hardly used to get the students to read the text independently.

Let's answer these questions.

- How did Suman explore when he noticed that his learners were struggling with reading skills?
- Why did he interview the previous grade teacher?

What did I find?

From my close observation, I found out that my students had difficulty in pronouncing individual words. They could not relate letters with sounds. They can read simple words, especially nouns, pronouns, and some verbs, but they struggled with adverbs, adjectives, and conjunctions. They also had problems in reading compound nouns. They reported to me that the previous teacher neither focused on teaching vocabulary nor made them read in front of the class. She focused on copying text and memorizing answers to the given questions only. They also told me that they felt difficulty in reading texts in paragraphs and got nervous while reading loudly in front of the class. The following reasons surfaced behind their incapability of reading.

- a) Inappropriate way of teaching
- b) Lack of exposure
- c) Lack of practice
- d) Lack of confidence

My plans for actions

Once I came to know the reasons, I planned to change my way of teaching. I planned to introduce major and difficult words from the text at the beginning of the lesson and made students practise the words. I also planned to use the vocabulary building game and the Total Physical Response (TPR) method of teaching vocabulary so that they could relate the words with their meanings. I planned to teach focusing on reading skills twice a week. I encouraged them to read individually in front of the class so that they could build confidence. I formed small groups so that good readers could help his/her group mates.

Let's answer these questions.

- What action plans did Suman design to help students to improve their reading skills?
- How were his plans aligned with what he explored earlier?
- Why do you think he focussed on vocabulary?

Implementation and outcomes of plan

According to the plan, I started teaching major vocabularies from the texts and made them pronounce them after me. I taught the words using TPR wherever possible. I used different vocabulary building

games such as BINGO, Run to the Board, etc. After drilling them a couple of times, I selected some students randomly to drill the words in front of the class and I kept observing their pronunciation. I encouraged the readers by making the class clap after their turn. After practising reading individual words, I showed a model of reading a short paragraph. Then, I let the students read the text silently and encourage them to ask if they had any problems. I visited each bench and helped them if they felt any difficulty. After 10 minutes of silent reading, I made some students read the text. I also assigned them reading tasks.

In the first few classes, they were nervous and hesitated to read in front of the class. So, I divided the class into 6 small groups with eight members in each group. The groups were formed in such a way that in each group, there was at least one student who could read well, and s/he would be responsible to help other group members. each member in the group had to read at least once a day. I used the same technique of teaching reading for 4 weeks. Gradually, the students showed the sign of improvement and showed confidence in reading loudly. Now, when I ask them who was interested to read in front of the class, most of the students would raise their hands to read voluntarily and would feel confident asking for help whenever they feel difficulty. Now, out of 45 students, 30 students could read simple paragraphs.

Let's answer these questions.

- How did Suman run the activities? Did he run them as he planned? Or did he make any changes on the way?
- How did the students respond emotionally in the beginning?
- What were the changes he got after implementing his plans for change?
- Was the issue fully solved?

Conclusion

From this exploratory action research, I found that lack of exposure and incorrect practice of teaching are the main causes of students not being able to read properly. If the students are taught without using correct techniques, it can hamper their learning. if there is any problem, the teacher should explore the situations and find the real problems as soon as possible. Once s/he finds the reasons for the problem, s/he can plan systematically to resolve the problem. In my case, when I found that the students were struggling to read words, I started teaching new and difficult words allowing students enough practice at the beginning of the lesson. It was really helpful for the students. Similarly, TPR encouraged students to engage in learning activities and promote learning reading skills. additionally, language games or word games motivated the students to learn words and they also made the learning fun.

Encouraging Students for Effective Learning

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Pointers for pondering

- Do your students actively engage in their learning?
- What challenges have you faced as an English language learner to encourage your students towards effective learning?
- How can EFL/ESL teachers help their students effectively engage in their learning?

Introduction

I am Tarka Bahadur Khatri and I am an English language teacher at Shree Ram Secondary School, Banke, Nepal. I teach English to the students of 6 through 12 grades having different levels of learning. My students come from different ethnic backgrounds with their native languages. This heterogeneous group dynamics has created some challenges to assist them in the class in the teaching and learning process.

Background

It was the time of academic year 2075 B.S (2018/2019). I was working as a class teacher in grade 8. There were 60 students but I found some of them absent in their daily attendance. the students came from Kumal, Chhetri and Tharu communities whose main occupation was agriculture. Parents of some of the students would go to India and other foreign countries to earn for manual jobs. I used to check the attendance regularly while teaching at my first period. About 10 students were always absent in their attendance. It was not the same but absentees would be different. I decided to find out what were the reasons behind their absence. I shared my idea with the headteacher and requested him to support my action research. My research question was ‘Why are some of my students not regular in their classes?’

So, I decided to carry out Exploratory Action Research (EAR) to find out the causes of their absence in the classes. Having realised the importance of EAR, I consulted other teachers.

An EAR is teacher’s small-scale practically useful research to understand a problem or success, and on that basis, plan to bring about the desired change. In this report, I have discussed how I followed these different stages of EAR in the context of my classroom.

My research questions

My EAR has focused to find out the actual reasons for my students' absence. So, I prepared these questions to guide my research.

- a. Why are my students irregular in the class?
- b. What are the main causes of their absence in the class?
- c. How do I make them regular in their study?
- d. What may be the ways that can help them reduce their absence in the class?
- e. How can teachers encourage them for their effective learning?

How did I explore my research issue?

I am a class teacher of Grade eight which means I am primarily responsible for the class. To begin, I took weekly and monthly tests related to the English course. I divided the students into two groups of 6 students each. I organized pair- work activities and group discussions in the classroom. I noticed that several students were missing. Then, I started recording the presence of the group members every day. I conducted the class tests weekly and kept the records of obtained marks of each student. I did the same continuously for one month. I calculated the test marks of each student. I listed the number of students who used to be absent during my class. I found no good results in their weekly tests and participation in the class activities. This situation struck on my mind and I brought this matter to the headteacher of my school. He called the meeting of the parents of those students who were frequently absent in their class and the tests. I prepared questionnaires for the parents and students as mentioned (see Appendix 1 & 2) to find out the actual problem of their absence. Similarly, I took interviews of the parents, teachers, and the students. This information was shared with the school management committee and discussed among the participants as well. It was decided that parents would instruct all the students to attend the class regularly.

What did I find?

With the activities among the students, teachers and parents conducted to explore the reasons and problems of their absence, I came to find out that my students frequently became absent in the class because of their household works to support their family.

I found out that the parents with poor economic backgrounds forced their children to stay at home to look after the goats and cows. The parents said that they were helpless if they could not get regular support in their household work from their children. They needed children's help for collecting firewood, cutting grass, looking after the cattle, working on the farm, etc. Similarly, members of the School Management Committee reflected what the parents said. The Students confessed that they were absent due to their household works. The chairperson of the Parents and Teachers' Association (PTA) expressed the concern that there was a lack of good relationship between the school and community. Students as

mentioned (see Appendix 3, Figure 3) were curious in their learning but due to the compulsion that they could not attend the school. The student attendance ratio was 5% to 10% percent in a month. As a result, they could not score good marks in the tests conducted at school. In the last test, 10 students in a test with full marks 25 scored 2, 3, 7, 5, 6, 3, 1, 5, 6, 3.

The above scores show the scores of those students who were frequently absent. While 7 was the highest score out of 25, the lowest was 1. None of them obtained even the pass marks in the test. The test examined listening and speaking skills. The headteacher reflected on the basic problems of the locality which cause the absence and its direct effects on learning.

This made me pick up this issue of students' absence and its effects on learning. I found my students were frequently absent which I noticed during my teaching time and at the time of taking a test at school. I took it as a common issue of the school that, until and unless the students did not participate in the class for the study then it was quite impossible to get the good result. So, I put this matter at the meeting of all the stakeholders of the school (SMC, PTA, and Teachers) in the result analysis meeting and made them familiar with this issue.

Before reading further, we would like you to consider the following questions.

1. If you were Tarka, what would you do to help your students effectively engage in their learning?
2. What other things can effectively engage the students in their learning?

What were my plans for actions?

After establishing the issue of my research, I decided to bring about some changes. But still, I was not convinced of the problem so I decided to explore once again. I called a meeting of the parents of all the students who had low attendance. I explained the importance of attending schools regularly and its achievements among the students. Most of the parents mentioned that they had a very difficult situation at home because of their occupation and other household works. Some students mentioned that with a small number of family members to do the house-hold work, they were unable to come to school regularly. Students had to go to look after the cattle and support parents at home. Similarly, I collected a record of attendance and used a checklist to find out the actual information of them. I requested the parents to send the students regularly. Then, I went with the actual problems of students individually. The problems mentioned by students are as follows:

- a. Household work
- b. Parentless situation
- c. Long distance to reach school
- d. Health problem

- e. Cattle grazing
- f. Household work
- g. Long distance
- h. Labour work

Based on the reasons, I planned for the following intervening actions:

- a) Call the meeting of the parents and share the result obtained by the students.
- b) Organize teacher staff interactions with students in attendance.
- c) Holding awareness raising session about the importance of attending school for achievement of learning.
- d) Pairing each regular student with an irregular one.
- e) Dividing groups including 4/4 students in a group for interactivities during the lesson.
- f) Classifying the problems
- g) Interacting with the parents

To complete my action, I designed an action plan to ensure my students work on free writing activities and providing opportunities for practising all four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills daily.

Implementation of my plans and the outcomes

After two weeks' observation and implementation of my action plan, I took a test of the students incorporating the test items based on listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills and I found the improved result. Teachers and students at the schools took interests in their attention on how to ensure the regular attendance in learning activities. The SMC members and PTA members were playing an active role in sending and observing the attendance of each student in the class. They took regular reports of the student attendance. This process took place regularly for two months. But it was very difficult to ensure the 100% attendance in the class. For this, there was the provision of arranging a meeting of all stakeholders of the school. I was hardly able to conduct the meeting of Management Committee during my observation. Likewise, the students felt difficult to be regular in the class for their study.

Among the students of grade eight, 10 students who were frequently irregular were taken as the sample to find out the reasons for this research. After collecting the data based on the questionnaires, I tried to find out ways to make the students regular in their English classroom.

From the interview with the students, I came to know that there were different reasons which compelled them to stay at home. Some of them had to look after cows and goats, some of them had the compulsion to support by staying at home for caring for their brothers and sisters. Some of them had to

go for household works such as looking after the cattle and taking them grazing in the jungle. In such situations, students faced their irregularities in their studies. to the point that they could not even read their textbook properly with good pronunciation.

With these findings, I tried to form a group of students including one irregular student in each group and I observed them for more than two weeks in their study. Their parents took my action positively and sent them to school regularly. As a result, they were able to improve their reading habits. Similarly, they were able to improve their listening, speaking, and writing skills.

Being a class teacher as well as their English language teacher, I tried my best to ensure and observe the attendance of my class 8 students. Though, I could not bring expected changes so I involved them in the different activities encouraging the active participation.

Group work and group activities

According to Davidson et al. (2014), *“Group work can be an effective method to motivate students, encourage active learning and develop key critical-thinking, communication and decision-making skills. But without careful planning and facilitation, group work can frustrate students and instructors and feel like a waste of time”* Accordingly, I divided the students into two groups and assigned them tasks. The first group took part in reading a text and the second group listened to the text read by the first group. I played the role of a facilitator and supported them when they had difficulty in reading the text and in pronunciation.

After the involvement in the activities for about ten minutes, the group was subdivided into two halves. I provided them a piece of paper and told them to record the words given on the board. Among them, one student played the role of a group leader and supported to read the words and the other members were evaluating the pronunciation. Each group worked separately and practised the reading with good pronunciation. I instructed them to read the text appropriately by locating the difficult word in each line of the text. I provided them 10 minutes for the group activities. I asked them to focus on how their group activities were taking place and who was playing an active role in the group activities. In each group, there were five students involved. I observed their group discussion and participation.

Students showed their active participation. My aim was to observe the activeness of the irregular students in the learning activities and to find out the activities which ensured the students’ participation in learning with high motivation. I provided sufficient time to involve them in the group work. Each group was involved in group activities.

I made some criteria to judge the group activities on the board for the judgment of each group so

that it would be impartial and transparent result as: active participation, involvement in discussion, Pronunciation, role play grammatical correctness, and leadership in group discussion. I divided each topic with five points. Altogether, it would be 25 points. Each group leader played an active role in leading and observing the activities performed by the team. I remained just a facilitator in monitoring the groups. The activities were observed with focus on being impartial. All the students showed their active participation in the group discussions and performed the activities assigned to them. They were involved in the group activities and I noticed that they were more friendly and supportive of me. Such activities motivated the students to attend their classes regularly and reduced the absent percentage.

Reassessing the situation

After the intervention, they reduced the absent rate and were generally found to be encouraged in learning English with active participation. They improved and started to speak and learn English more seriously. However, the students who missed their regular classes were still low in their academic achievement. Most of the students felt happy in learning English with active participation because they thought that I had given them sufficient opportunity and encouragement to do so, and they felt encouraged or happy in class while learning. still 5% of the students struggled in English because they felt nervous or uncomfortable due to their poor school attendance.

As my students performed poorly during the tests, I encouraged them to involve in free writing as mentioned in (see Appendix 3, Figure 4 & 5) to practise them with the support of good performing students. I found 95% of the students attending regularly in my class. The general strategies to ensure that all the students can participate in the class are: motivational environment at home and school for the study, classroom management during the time of taking class, finding the reasons for being absent in class of each student by consulting the parents and creating the learning environment by SMC, PTA, Parents and Teachers, and collaborating among them. The headteacher collaborated with all the stakeholders of the school to bring my action plan to implementation. He also made and ran his action plan to observe and find out the problems and solutions to assist me in teaching and the irregular students. I ran my action plan including the stakeholders by designing some questionnaires to the participants as per the situation to see the exact result of my action plan and research. The issue was not fully solved but it brought positivity and awareness to the parents who involved the students at household works. I could not achieve the 100% result because of the problems of their parents to struggle in the daily life and household works of the learners. we could bring positive changes in our classroom if we plan and implement action plan by taking different factors into consideration.

Some problems, suggestions and strategies

After reassessing the situation, the participants provided some problems; suggestions and strategies that could improve the situation of teaching for the learners are mentioned below:

A) Problems indicated by the participants

1. There are different reasons behind the students' irregularities at school.
2. The social and economical imbalance for equal opportunities
3. The poor economic condition of parents
4. Lack of motivating factors at school
5. The medium of instruction used in the classroom

B) Suggestions from the participants

1. Managing the expectations of learners from the primary level to secondary level using technology
2. The teachers and school management committee should consider providing equal access to learning.
3. Management of punishment and reward system in study
4. Learning should be given high priority by participating the learners in the group and pair work activities
5. There should be strict monitoring of the English learning environment among the students. The students must be counselled or taken action as per need
6. The problems of students which force them to be absent at school should be reduced by supporting students to be regular in the study

C) Strategies for English learning environment (both in the classroom and the school premises)

- a) Parents counselling and meeting should be arranged regularly concerning irregular students.
- b) Managing the expectations of learners around the homework
- c) Helping the children for preparing for tests
- d) Creating casual opportunities for spaced retrieval practice
- e) Balancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation
- f) Modelling the good learning strategies, etc

Conclusion

There are many reasons that students are unable to attend activities of learning English effectively. An EAR can involve teachers to find out the problems and issues in the classroom. A teacher must behave friendly with the students to reduce the absence of students and encourage them to learn by doing themselves. In the same way, parents should be aware of sending their children regularly to school. Students should be active in participating in the activities of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English. Thus, I observed my students by arranging the assembly as mentioned in (see Appendix 3, Figure 6) continuously for more than one month with a variety of methods and techniques used in

class and saw some positive changes taking place. They started opening up more and asking questions. They were ready to participate in my classroom activities. They were more supportive of me. The main reasons/problems as mentioned for being absent includes workplace harassment, family related issues, illness, etc. So, it is concluded that there can be valuable role of parents, school environment, and teachers to ensure the learners involving in better or effective learning. I completed my EAR with the direct co-operation of the respondents who supported me to find out the problems and their solutions. Similarly, the action result concluded with some strategies and suggestions as mentioned above.

Reference

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questions for Students (Interview)

1. How do you assess the present situation attending classes of English in your school?
2. What are the factors that demotivate you in attending English classes at school?
3. What do you think can motivate students to use more English?

Appendix 2: Questions for Parents & Teachers (Interview)

- a) What can be the major factors hindering their regularities?
- b) How can you motivate students in attending learning activities?
- c) Why some parents force their children to stay at home?
- d) Do teachers play a vital role in participating students in school activities?
- e) What can be the pushing factors for students at schools

Appendix 3: Some Pictures related to an exploratory action research



Figure 1. Shree Ram Secondary School Kohalpur -14 Hawaldarpur, Banke



Figure 2. Students involved in test and interview for the action research



Figure 3. Grade 8 Students in the assembly

This book introduces exploratory action research (EAR) and presents the EAR stories of Nepalese EFL teachers who carried out EAR in their classrooms. The stories of teachers in this volume discuss the common problems that teachers noticed in their classrooms, the steps that they took to explore their issues, the strategies they designed based on the findings of the exploration to address them, the ways they implemented those strategies and the outcomes they observed upon the implementation of their plans. They also reveal how teachers can address their classroom problems with their own initiatives by exploring their own situations. Rather than adopting experts' advice which may be contextually irrelevant in their specific situations, teachers can carry out EAR to deal with their own classroom puzzles more confidently to improve their classroom pedagogy.



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