

Innovative Strategies for Strengthening Oral Communication in the ELT Classrooms: Cultivating Empathy and Empowerment in Nepalese Context

Motikala Subba Dewan

Associate Professor of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, Tribhuvan University

ABSTRACT: Oral communication is a fundamental component of English Language Teaching (ELT), enabling learners to engage effectively in real-world interactions. This study evaluates innovative strategies for enhancing oral communication skills in Nepalese ELT classrooms, with a focus on how empathy and empowerment foster a supportive learning environment. By integrating learner-centered approaches such as technology, gamification, interactive learning, role-play, collaborative tasks, project-based learning, and structured presentations, the research addresses common challenges, such as low confidence and fluency. Grounded in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), the study highlights how empathy promotes both linguistic and interpersonal growth, while empowerment strengthens learners' self-efficacy and active participation. It also identifies key barriers, such as large class sizes, limited resources, and inadequate teacher training, that hinder the development of speaking skills among ELT learners in Nepal. By prioritizing empathy and empowerment, the research provides valuable insights into curriculum reform, professional development, and the effective use of local resources in constrained environments. Its findings contribute to the global ELT discourse, offering recommendations for improving oral communication skills in similar educational contexts worldwide. Drawing on the researcher's experience in Nepalese ELT classrooms, the study examines both challenges and opportunities in transforming oral communication through empathetic and innovative practices, ultimately advocating for a more inclusive, participatory, and dynamic learning environment.

KEYWORDS: Oral communication, empathy and empowerment, innovative strategies, Nepalese ELT context

INTRODUCTION

Oral communication is a cornerstone of English Language Teaching (ELT), enabling learners to engage effectively in real-world interactions (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, in the Nepalese ELT context, students often struggle with low confidence, limited fluency, and a lack of opportunities for meaningful practice. Fluency, as Harmer (2006) emphasizes, "requires mastering language features while processing information spontaneously" (p. 269). Brown (2007) highlights that practicing speaking in authentic situations boosts learners' confidence, which, in turn, positively influences other language skills such as reading and writing. Traditional teaching methods, which prioritize rote learning and grammar over communicative competence, have proven insufficient in addressing these challenges (Shrestha, 2018). Systemic issues such as large class sizes, insufficient resources, and inadequate teacher training further exacerbate the problem (Gautam, 2020; Phyak, 2016). The study aims to identify the challenges ELT learners face in developing speaking skills in Nepal, explore innovative teaching methodologies, and provide practical recommendations for teachers and educators. To achieve these objectives, it examines the following research questions: What barriers hinder the oral proficiency of ELT learners? What innovative teaching strategies can enhance oral communication skills in ELT classrooms? How can these strategies cultivate empathy and empowerment among Nepalese ELT learners? Building on these objectives, the study seeks to bridge this gap by exploring innovative, learner-centered strategies that integrate empathy and empowerment to enhance oral communication skills.

Grounded in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), the research examines approaches such as technology integration, gamification, role play, collaborative tasks, etc. to build students' confidence and fluency (Brown, 2007; Dörnyei, 2009). Additionally, it identifies key barriers such as resource constraints and large class sizes and proposes practical solutions to improve oral proficiency, ensuring a more engaging and effective ELT learning environment. Based on the researcher's teaching and research experiences in Nepalese ELT classrooms, this study highlights the transformative impact of empathetic and innovative approaches in enhancing oral communication while fostering a more inclusive and engaging learning environment. By focusing on empathy and empowerment, the research offers useful ideas for improving curriculum, teacher development, and resource management in settings with limited resources (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). The findings also add to the global conversation about ELT, providing practical suggestions that can be applied in similar educational situations around the world.

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The growing importance of oral communication in professional and academic settings has driven a global demand for strong speaking skills. Employers now prioritize oral communication abilities, leading to a rise in courses designed to enhance this skill in both formal and informal educational contexts. As Nunan (2003) notes, "speaking is the ability to express opinions, ideas, or thoughts orally; it consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meanings in order to be understood by the people we are speaking with" (p. 40). This definition underlines the importance of structured speech in ensuring clarity and comprehension, which are essential for effective communication. Oral communication encompasses multiple components, including listening skills, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, interactive activities, technology integration, cultural competence, and non-verbal communication. Burns (2019) emphasizes that speaking skills are built on comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency, which collectively enable learners to communicate confidently and independently. These elements are foundational to effective English Language Teaching (ELT) and must be tailored to learners' specific needs and proficiency levels to ensure successful oral communication methodologies.

English in Nepal functions as a second language (L2), typically acquired after the first language (L1) through natural exposure or formal instruction, serving essential communicative, academic, and professional roles (Gass & Selinker, 2020). While some learners develop L2 proficiency through immersion in multilingual environments, others rely on systematic classroom instruction. Regardless of the mode of acquisition, proficiency in English is essential for academic and professional success. Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis underscores the importance of comprehensible input slightly beyond learners' current proficiency level, emphasizing meaningful communication and interaction. Ellis (2015) defines L2 as any language learned after L1, with proficiency influenced by factors such as learning environment, exposure, motivation, and socio-cultural context (Ortega, 2013; Cook, 2016). Speaking is a central component of second-language acquisition, allowing learners to express themselves, engage in meaningful exchanges, and navigate real-life situations (Brown, 1994). Harmer (2001) emphasizes that spoken interaction promotes social, cultural, and academic integration, underscoring its importance in ELT. In Nepal's multilingual setting, English serves as a bridge language, making ELT crucial in equipping learners with effective communication skills. However, traditional ELT practices in Nepal have historically emphasized grammar and rote memorization over practical speaking skills, limiting learners' ability to use English in real-world contexts (Lightbown & Spada, 2020). Large class sizes, limited resources, and cultural barriers further hinder the implementation of learner-centered approaches, affecting students' confidence and fluency. Gnawali (2018) notes a heavy reliance on memorization rather than fostering communicative competence, while Sharma and Phyak (2017) highlight the dominance of grammar over practical language use. Bhattarai (2011) attributes this to a long-standing dependence on textbook-focused, grammar-translation methods, and Giri (2014) adds that this approach neglects communicative skills, ultimately restricting learners' fluency and engagement.

In Nepal, where English proficiency is key to higher education and employment, integrating empathy and empowerment into ELT can have a transformative impact on learners' academic and professional growth. English proficiency is essential for higher education and employment, empowering students to communicate effectively has a profound impact on their academic and professional success (Phyak, 2016). By prioritizing these approaches, educators can create dynamic, student-centered classrooms that enhance communication skills and prepare learners for global engagement. Empathy in education, defined as the ability of educators and learners to understand and share the feelings of others, plays a critical role in enhancing interpersonal relationships and academic success (Zins et al., 2004). In language learning contexts, empathy enables teachers to recognize and address cultural and linguistic challenges, leading to more compassionate and effective teaching strategies (Goleman, 2006). Building on this, learner empowerment involves enabling students to take control of their learning, develop autonomy, and build self-confidence. Freire (1970) critiques the "banking model" of teaching, where students passively receive knowledge, and advocates for a dialogic approach that values their voices and experiences. This shift from passive learning to active participation is particularly relevant in English Language Teaching (ELT) contexts, where interactive activities such as group discussions, role-plays, and project-based learning provide students with meaningful opportunities to develop oral communication skills (Nunan, 1999).

Integrating empathy and learner empowerment into ELT classrooms bridges gaps in oral proficiency while fostering a supportive environment that encourages participation and confidence. In Nepal's multilingual and multicultural context, creating an inclusive ELT environment is essential, with empathy playing a key role in addressing students' challenges in oral communication by fostering a sense of belonging and promoting active engagement. Understanding these challenges allows teachers to design interactive, student-centered activities that build confidence and enhance agency (Shrestha, 2020). Shifting towards communicative ELT approaches transforms language learning into a socially and emotionally enriching experience, equipping learners with the skills needed for academic, professional, and global engagement. However, in Nepalese ELT classrooms, oral communication is often underemphasized, with a heavy focus on reading, writing, and grammar, limiting opportunities for meaningful spoken interaction. As Ellis (1994) highlights, oral proficiency is crucial in ESL education, as fluency in speaking boosts learners' confidence and motivation. Successfully completing communicative tasks fosters a sense of accomplishment, while struggles with speaking can

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lead to frustration and disengagement. By prioritizing oral communication and empathy-driven, learner-centered strategies, ELT in Nepal can transform into a more dynamic and effective process that enhances both linguistic and social-emotional competencies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of oral communication in English Language Teaching (ELT) is well-established. However, many ELT classrooms in Nepal face challenges in effectively enhancing students' speaking skills. Traditional teaching methods have primarily focused on grammar and reading comprehension, but innovative strategies that emphasize empathy and empowerment are essential for creating an inclusive and engaging learning environment. In recent years, the demand for English-speaking skills has increased, particularly among employers seeking candidates proficient in English to meet the needs of Nepalese individuals pursuing employment abroad. A study by Shrestha et al. (2018) highlights that English language proficiency is crucial for engineers in Nepal, as employers prefer candidates who can communicate effectively in English. This trend extends beyond the engineering sector, with various industries in Nepal requiring employees with strong English skills to support the growing number of Nepalese workers seeking jobs overseas. Proficiency in English not only enhances their prospects in foreign job markets but also contributes to Nepal's economy through remittances. Additionally, the tourism sector relies on employees with fluent communication skills to support economic growth. Despite the importance of oral communication, current educational practices often fall short in effectively enhancing these skills. This literature review examines existing research on oral communication strategies in ELT and explores how fostering empathy and empowerment can transform student engagement and proficiency, particularly in the Nepalese context. A critical analysis of the research reveals both persistent challenges and emerging opportunities in improving oral communication skills in Nepalese ELT classrooms.

Traditional teaching methods in Nepal have long prioritized grammar and vocabulary instruction, often at the expense of oral communication skills. As a result, learners may achieve proficiency in written English but struggle with real-world interactions. Gautam (2020) found that less than five percent of classroom time is dedicated to oral activities, with teachers dominating discussions. This teacher-centered approach limits students' ability to develop fluency and engage in meaningful conversations (Richards, 2015). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes interaction and real-world language use, has been shown to be more effective in enhancing oral proficiency (Littlewood, 2014). Richards and Rodgers (2014) highlight that CLT prioritizes interaction as both the means and the goal of language learning. Unlike traditional methods focused primarily on grammar and vocabulary, CLT encourages communicative competence through activities such as role-plays, group work, and problem-solving tasks, fostering authentic language use. However, many ELT classrooms in Nepal still adhere to teacher-centered methods, limiting students' opportunities for meaningful communication (Bhattarai & Gautam, 2020). Integrating culturally responsive teaching further strengthens CLT by acknowledging and incorporating students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. García and Wei (2014) emphasize the importance of valuing students' diverse experiences in language instruction, which enhances engagement and learning outcomes. By combining CLT with culturally responsive practices, ELT in Nepal can create more dynamic, inclusive, and effective learning environments that promote fluency and confidence. An essential component of this approach is Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), which plays a crucial role in fostering self-awareness, emotional regulation, social skills, and responsible decision-making, all of which contribute to a supportive and effective language-learning environment (CASEL, 2023). Since CLT emphasizes meaningful interaction and real-world language use, integrating SEL principles further enhances students' confidence and willingness to engage in communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). By addressing both the cognitive and emotional aspects of language learning, SEL supports culturally responsive teaching by valuing students' diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, ultimately improving engagement, motivation, and communicative competence. When students feel emotionally secure and supported, they are more likely to participate in communicative activities such as role-plays, group discussions, and problem-solving tasks, thereby enhancing their fluency and confidence.

Research suggests that incorporating SEL in ELT classrooms helps reduce foreign language anxiety, a common barrier to oral proficiency, by promoting mindfulness and emotional regulation strategies (MacIntyre et al., 2019). Additionally, SEL fosters peer collaboration, empathy, and social awareness, all of which are essential for effective communication in CLT-based learning environments (Mercer & Gkonou, 2020). A positive, emotionally supportive classroom encourages risk-taking in language use, which is crucial for developing fluency and communicative competence (Oxford, 2017). Furthermore, SEL enhances culturally responsive teaching by recognizing and valuing students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, making language learning more meaningful and inclusive (García & Wei, 2014). By integrating SEL into ELT, educators can create a classroom atmosphere that supports not only linguistic development but also emotional resilience, social engagement, and student motivation, ultimately leading to improved language acquisition and overall well-being (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016).

While reading, writing, and listening are important, speaking is often the most essential skill because it shows how well a learner can use the language in real-life situations (Kramasch, 1993). Unlike reading and writing, which allow more time to think and

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respond, speaking requires quick thinking and immediate responses. For example, a student might be good at reading and writing but struggle to hold conversations, ask questions, or join in casual discussions. This difficulty can make real-life communication, such as talking at work or making friends, more challenging. Building strong speaking skills helps learners use English confidently in daily life. However, teaching speaking is not always easy. Students may feel nervous about making mistakes, have little chance to hear native speakers, or find it hard to turn their knowledge into fluent speech (Baker & Westrup, 2003). To overcome these challenges, teachers need to create a supportive and engaging environment that encourages practice and boosts students' confidence. These difficulties highlight the need for specific strategies to help learners improve their speaking skills. Benus (2021) explains that speaking is a natural and automatic process, similar to catching a ball. Even saying simple words or phrases, like "bag" or "on the top," requires different parts of the body—such as the tongue, lips, and vocal cords—to work together smoothly. When speaking in a conversation, we also pay attention to how others respond and adjust our speech accordingly. This coordination happens quickly and often without us thinking about it, making speaking a complex skill that requires both physical and mental effort. Ellis (2008) highlights the importance of practice and reinforcement in enabling learners to produce meaningful utterances and engage in broader communicative contexts. Despite its benefits, CLT's effectiveness is often hindered by insufficient language exposure, limiting learners' fluency development. To improve spoken communication in English, teachers need creative approaches that give students plenty of opportunities to practice speaking. This helps make language learning complete and more effective.

In English Language Teaching (ELT), helping students improve their speaking skills is crucial for real-life situations like conversations, discussions, and presentations. When students succeed in these tasks, they become more confident and motivated to keep learning. As Morrow (2004) points out, speaking also strengthens other language skills, especially listening, since good communication requires active engagement. Similarly, Canale and Swain (1980) highlight that being a good communicator is not just about knowing the language but also about using it appropriately in different situations. To empower students, teachers can encourage independence by letting them choose discussion topics, lead group activities, and give feedback to their peers. These strategies help students feel more in control of their learning. By using creative and interactive teaching methods, ELT educators can make classrooms more engaging and better prepare students with the language and social skills they need for both academic success and everyday life. With increasing demand for English skills in Nepal's job market and tourism industry, many students still do not get enough opportunities to practice speaking (Shrestha et al., 2018). This highlights the need for new teaching methods that combine global best practices with Nepal's unique culture and language needs. Training programs for teachers can help improve the way speaking skills are taught, but there is little research on how social and emotional skills like empathy and empowerment can support language learning. While some studies recognize their importance (Dewaele, 2018), more research is needed to explore how they can be effectively included in English teaching. By adapting successful international strategies to Nepal's education system, this study aims to create a more inclusive and practical approach to ELT teaching, helping students become confident and effective English speakers.

A key aspect of effective oral communication in English Language Teaching (ELT) is cultural competence, which enables learners to engage confidently in cross-cultural interactions (Byram, 2021). In ELT classrooms, culturally responsive teaching (CRT) plays a crucial role in language learning by incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into lessons, fostering an inclusive and engaging environment (Gay, 2018). This approach not only enhances students' motivation but also helps them connect language learning with real-life experiences, making communication more meaningful. Research highlights the significance of oral proficiency in second language acquisition (SLA) across different educational contexts. In ELT settings in Asia, Wang and Bai (2019) emphasize that strong speaking skills are essential for developing communicative competence, which, in turn, supports reading comprehension and academic success. Similarly, European studies stress the value of interactive speaking tasks that simulate real-life conversations, helping learners use English in authentic situations and develop greater fluency (Dörnyei, 2005). These insights highlight the importance of integrating oral communication strategies into ELT curricula to ensure students gain the confidence and skills needed for effective communication. However, the successful implementation of communicative methodologies in ELT requires well-trained educators who can create meaningful speaking opportunities and facilitate student interaction. Teachers must be equipped with innovative strategies that encourage active participation, reduce anxiety, and provide ample exposure to spoken English.

Teaching oral communication in Nepalese ESL classrooms faces significant obstacles, as traditional methods prioritize grammar and writing over speaking, leaving students ill-prepared for real-world communication (Bhattarai, 2018; Gautam, 2020). Although Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes interaction and real-life language use (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), its adoption is hindered by teacher-centered instruction, a lack of culturally relevant materials, and insufficient teacher training (Sharma, 2019). Large class sizes further limit personalized feedback and meaningful student interaction, reducing opportunities for learners to develop fluency and confidence (Smith & Jones, 2019; Brown et al., 2020). Additionally, the role of empathy and encouragement in fostering students' motivation is often overlooked, particularly in Nepal's multilingual and multicultural classrooms (Mercer, 2016; Norton, 2013). Addressing these challenges requires innovative strategies such as active learning, technology integration, and flipped classroom models, which can create more engaging and interactive learning environments (Johnson et al., 2018; Taylor & Lee, 2021). By integrating CLT principles with evidence-based practices suited to large classrooms,

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ELT in Nepal can enhance students' oral communication skills, ensuring they not only understand English but can also use it effectively in diverse contexts. A comprehensive approach that includes culturally responsive teaching, ongoing teacher training, and supportive learning environments is essential for empowering students to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers and achieve communicative competence.

In recent years, many Nepalese schools have adopted the communicative teaching approach, with course books increasingly offering opportunities for students to practice speaking and engage in oral communication activities inside and outside the classroom. These oral communication practices have contributed to the communicative approach gaining recognition as a key component of teaching and learning. Currently, the focus in Nepalese schools has shifted from teacher-dominated instruction to student-centered learning. Teachers act as facilitators, encouraging active student participation through tasks such as problem-solving activities and collaborative projects (Nunan, 1991). Additionally, many private and even some government schools have adopted English as the medium of instruction for all subjects. This immersion strategy helps students build confidence in using English across different contexts (Dearden, 2014). Improving English learning in Nepal requires more than just teaching grammar and vocabulary. Students need more opportunities to practice speaking in real-world situations, but large class sizes often make it difficult for teachers to provide individualized attention and meaningful interaction. With limited resources and high student-to-teacher ratios, engaging learners in communicative activities becomes a challenge. To overcome this, teachers should adopt culturally responsive methods that fit Nepal's unique context while finding innovative ways to promote student participation. Training programs can help educators implement better strategies for teaching oral communication, even in large classrooms. While research has shown that skills like empathy and confidence help in language learning, more studies are needed on how to effectively integrate these into ESL teaching. By combining global best practices with Nepal's specific needs, this approach can create a more supportive and effective learning environment, helping students communicate confidently in school, work, and daily life.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore innovative strategies for enhancing oral communication skills in Nepalese ESL classrooms. Grounded in the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), it addresses key challenges such as large class sizes, limited resources, and the need for teacher training and professional development. Drawing on the researchers' collective three decades of ESL teaching experience, the study integrates reflective practice with secondary data analysis. It examines strategies such as task-based learning, technology integration, learner-centered methods, gamification, interactive learning, and project-based activities like presentations and group work, widely recommended by linguists and educational researchers to enhance speaking skills. Qualitative data were gathered through document analysis, primary and secondary sources. Additionally, surveys assessed teachers' familiarity with CLT and SEL principles and their perceived effectiveness in overcoming classroom barriers.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) are two complementary educational frameworks that create a holistic approach to language learning. CLT emphasizes interaction and real-world communication, focusing on learners' ability to use language effectively in authentic contexts. Activities such as role-plays, group discussions, and collaborative tasks enhance linguistic skills while fostering meaningful interactions among students. For instance, a CLT-based classroom might involve a job interview simulation, allowing students to practice vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation while building confidence and fluency (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). These interactive tasks help students navigate social situations, express their thoughts clearly, and respond appropriately, skills essential for both language learning and personal growth. The growing demand for English proficiency in academic and professional contexts has led to the widespread adoption of CLT methodologies, particularly in urban and semi-urban schools where English is often the medium of instruction (Richards, 2006). Interactive learning, which involves active participation through discussions, simulations, and hands-on activities, further enhances this approach by fostering deeper understanding and collaboration. Similarly, in ELT, digital tools and interactive activities reinforce communication skills and promote meaningful learner engagement by prioritizing fluency over grammatical accuracy. These approaches encourage students to use English in real-life scenarios, making language learning more practical and immersive. However, implementing CLT in rural Nepal remains challenging due to large class sizes, limited resources, and inadequate teacher training, which hinder the effectiveness of interactive and communicative methods. Despite these constraints, the shift toward communicative approaches reflects a broader recognition of the importance of practical language use in Nepal's multilingual and multicultural educational landscape. To further develop students' speaking and listening skills, English teachers incorporate activities such as storytelling, debates, and oral presentations. Additionally, multimedia tools like audio recordings and videos expose students to native-like pronunciation and accents, creating a more immersive learning experience (Brown, 2001). These strategies help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world communication, making language learning more effective and engaging.

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The integration of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) creates a holistic approach to language education, benefiting learners both academically and personally. While CLT emphasizes interaction and real-world communication, SEL focuses on developing emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills. By fostering empathy, emotional regulation, and responsible decision-making, SEL creates a supportive environment where students feel confident engaging in communicative activities. For example, in a language class, students might discuss their fears about making mistakes and brainstorm strategies to overcome them, enhancing both their linguistic competence and emotional resilience (CASEL, 2020). A collaborative project, such as creating a podcast on a social issue like climate change, exemplifies the synergy between CLT and SEL. Students develop language skills through research, writing, and presentation (CLT) while also practicing teamwork, perspective-taking, and conflict resolution (SEL). Reflective practices further strengthen this integration, as students assess how they managed their emotions and supported peers, fostering self-awareness and emotional regulation (Gkonou & Mercer, 2017). These strategies can be seamlessly incorporated into innovative approaches like the Task-Based Approach (TBA), enhancing oral communication and meaningful learning experiences.

Task-Based Approach (TBA) is an effective tool for developing oral communication skills, as it prioritizes meaningful discourse over language form instruction. Prabhu (1987) notes that "in task-based teaching, lessons... are not acts of text or language presentation, but rather contexts for discourse creation" (p. 97). By engaging in tasks that require real-world communication, students practice and refine their speaking skills in authentic contexts. Reflective practices further enhance this process, allowing learners to analyze their communication strategies, emotional responses, and peer interactions, leading to deeper learning and improved performance. Ellis (2003) highlights that tasks replicate real-world activities, such as making calls, conducting interviews, or planning events, with a focus on task completion rather than language accuracy. For example, in a task like "organizing a school event," the teacher first introduces key vocabulary (e.g., schedule, budget, invitations) and models a conversation. During the task phase, students collaborate to plan the event, assign roles (e.g., budget manager, coordinator), and discuss key details. In the post-task phase, they present their plans, receive peer feedback, and the class votes on the most feasible or creative idea. Throughout the process, the teacher facilitates discussion, highlights effective language use, and provides constructive feedback. This approach fosters meaningful interactions, enhancing students' confidence and fluency in real-life communication. Research supports TBA's effectiveness in improving oral communication, with Rahman (2010) emphasizing its role in academic settings, while Sethi (2012) highlights its success in motivating students and enhancing their communicative abilities. By integrating authentic tasks, TBA transforms language learning into an interactive and practical experience. Similarly, Project-Based Learning (PBL) extends this approach by involving students in real-world projects over an extended period, promoting critical thinking and problem-solving. For instance, a PBL task like designing a community garden for an environmental science unit requires students to research plant species, create a budget, and present their plan to local stakeholders, integrating science, math, and communication skills. Both TBA and PBL make language learning engaging and relevant, equipping students with essential communication and problem-solving abilities.

Learner-centered approaches in English Language Teaching (ELT) prioritize students' needs, interests, and abilities, fostering autonomy and engagement. By shifting the focus from teacher-led instruction to active student participation, these methods encourage meaningful communication in real-world contexts (Nunan, 2013). In oral communication, learner-centered strategies help students build confidence, fluency, and interactional competence by providing opportunities for authentic language use. One key strategy is Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), where learners engage in communicative tasks that simulate real-life situations, such as role-playing, problem-solving discussions, and debates. Research indicates that TBLT enhances oral proficiency by creating meaningful and interactive experiences that promote spontaneous language production (Ellis, 2018). For instance, in Nepalese ELT classrooms, students can participate in storytelling activities based on local narratives, fostering both linguistic and cultural engagement.

Another effective approach is role play, is an effective method for teaching oral communication, particularly in English Language Teaching (ELT). It helps students develop communicative competence, interpersonal skills, and fluency within social and pragmatic contexts. Gower, Phillips, and Walters (1995) describe role plays as cooperative activities that enhance language and interpersonal norms. Similarly, Snarski (2007) emphasizes that "role plays promote student interaction and attentiveness, providing all learners with opportunities to practice speaking" (p. 3). Beyond improving language skills, role plays also foster essential soft skills and interpersonal abilities. In this activity, the teacher assigns roles to students, explaining who will play what role. During the role play, the teacher observes, provides feedback on language use, pronunciation, and fluency, and highlights effective communication examples. This realistic and engaging activity helps students build confidence and improve their ability to use English in practical situations. Class or group discussions too are effective tools for oral communication, helping students build opinions and viewpoints on various topics. These discussions, whether student-to-student or student-to-teacher, enhance awareness of communicative functions. Thornbury and Slade (2006) emphasize their role in English language learning, fostering spoken language competency

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in real-life contexts and developing interpersonal communication skills. To maximize their impact, teachers should create a comfortable environment and structure discussions in ways that suit students, such as group tasks, prepared topics, or impromptu prompts. Alternative discussion formats can also cater to students' interests in language learning contexts. Role-Playing and Simulations allow students to practice real-life communication scenarios, such as job interviews or public speaking, in a safe and supportive environment. This not only builds oral communication skills but also boosts confidence and empowerment (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Brown (2001) highlights the effectiveness of group work, defining it as “tasks involving collaboration and self-initiated language among small groups of students” (p. 173). Similarly, Harmer (1998) suggests three strategies for teaching speaking: rehearsal (opportunities to practice speaking freely), feedback (learning through teacher or peer input), and engagement (active participation in discussions and problem-solving). Group work fosters motivation, reduces anxiety, and encourages cooperation, allowing students to express themselves in social and cultural contexts through activities such as discussions, debates, role plays, and storytelling (pp. 87-88). Presentations further develop oral communication skills by providing students with opportunities to practice speaking, build confidence, and receive constructive feedback. Chivers and Shoolbred (2007) emphasize that “presentations build individuality, reduce nervousness, and develop interpersonal and communication skills essential for employment” (p. 9). Teachers can design presentations based on students' language competencies, using group presentations to ease anxiety and encourage participation. This learner-centered approach enhances motivation by making students feel valued while improving their communication skills beyond traditional language classes. Additionally, collaborative and cooperative learning support oral communication by fostering teamwork and shared learning experiences. While collaborative learning involves students working together on shared tasks, cooperative learning is more structured, emphasizing interdependence, accountability, and interaction. Djwandono (2006) notes that “cooperative learning enhances language acquisition by promoting collaboration in small groups or pairs” (p. 32), while Byrd (2009) highlights its role in achieving learning objectives through group-based instruction (p. 18). As integral components of Communicative Language Teaching, these methods engage students and strengthen both productive and receptive skills. Integrating group activities and peer feedback sessions creates a supportive environment where students feel comfortable practicing oral communication. Furthermore, this approach fosters empathy, as students learn to listen to and respect diverse perspectives (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). By incorporating these strategies, educators can create a dynamic and interactive learning environment that effectively enhances students' communication skills.

Culturally Responsive Teaching further enhances engagement by incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum; for instance, using Nepali folktales or local issues as discussion topics helps students connect with the material and express themselves more confidently (Gay, 2010). Technology also plays a crucial role in language development by offering opportunities to practice speaking and receive feedback through tools like video recordings, podcasts, and language apps (Warschauer, 2005). As access to technology grows in Nepal, Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Google Classroom and Canvas facilitate personalized and interactive learning through coursework, collaboration, and instant feedback. The widespread use of digital tools and English in daily communication, even by individuals with limited formal education who use common phrases like “interesting” or “sorry,” emphasizes the global significance of English and the need for effective teaching methods. In Nepalese classrooms, students engage in projects that integrate language learning with critical thinking and teamwork, while the rise of digital technology supports blended learning, where online resources and apps complement traditional teaching (Stockwell, 2007). Additionally, performance-based assessments, such as group projects and presentations, are increasingly used to evaluate communicative abilities, moving away from reliance on written exams (Harmer, 2007). These changes reflect the growing emphasis on interactive, learner-centered approaches that enhance oral communication skills in Nepalese ELT classrooms.

Gamification is an effective approach in English Language Teaching (ELT) to enhance oral communication by incorporating game-design elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, and challenges. It creates an engaging and interactive learning environment that fosters motivation and participation. According to Deterding et al. (2011), gamification refers to “the use of game design elements in non-game contexts” (p. 10), emphasizing its role in making learning more engaging and rewarding without requiring full-fledged games. Research has shown that gamification can significantly boost student motivation by tapping into both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators (Hamari et al., 2014). For instance, platforms like Duolingo encourage consistent language practice through streaks, experience points, and leaderboards, while tools like Classcraft transform classroom activities into role-playing games where students earn rewards for completing tasks. In ELT, particularly in Nepal, gamification can be a powerful tool to improve oral communication by making speaking exercises more dynamic and enjoyable. Teachers can integrate gamified activities such as storytelling challenges, pronunciation battles, or role-playing scenarios, where students earn points for effective communication. Additionally, gamification fosters immediate feedback, allowing learners to track progress and refine their speaking skills in real time. Studies by Sailer et al. (2017) have demonstrated that gamified learning environments positively impact cognitive, emotional,

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and social learning outcomes, making them highly relevant in Nepal's ELT context. As digital access expands, integrating gamification into ELT classrooms can encourage active participation, boost learners' confidence in speaking English, and ultimately improve their oral proficiency.

Another effective strategy is collaborative learning, which promotes peer interaction and cooperative problem-solving. Group discussions, peer feedback sessions, and think-pair-share activities create an inclusive environment where students practice speaking without fear of making mistakes (Richards, 2015). This approach is particularly valuable in multilingual settings like Nepal, where students benefit from exposure to diverse linguistic perspectives. Furthermore, integrating technology into learner-centered instruction enhances oral communication by providing additional speaking opportunities. Digital tools such as voice recording apps, virtual language exchanges, and gamified platforms like Duolingo and Flipgrid offer learners the chance to practice speaking beyond the classroom (Warschauer & Liaw, 2011). These tools enable real-time feedback and self-assessment, making learning more engaging and effective. Ultimately, learner-centered strategies in ELT promote oral proficiency by encouraging students to take ownership of their learning, engage in meaningful communication, and develop confidence in using English in diverse contexts. By incorporating authentic tasks, collaborative learning, and technological tools, educators can create a dynamic and interactive environment that supports the development of strong oral communication skills.

Incorporating innovative strategies such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and digital tools into English Language Teaching (ELT) fosters an engaging, student-centered learning environment. These methodologies prioritize fluency, collaboration, and real-world application, equipping learners with both linguistic and interpersonal skills essential for academic and professional success. In Nepal, the shift from teacher-dominated instruction to learner-centered approaches has encouraged active participation through interactive tasks, problem-solving activities, and project-based learning. The integration of digital resources and blended learning further enhances accessibility and engagement, allowing students to practice oral communication in diverse contexts. Despite challenges such as resource limitations in rural areas, the adoption of performance-based assessments and immersive learning strategies continues to strengthen ELT practices. Moving forward, a balanced approach that adapts to learners' needs while leveraging technological advancements will be key to improving oral communication proficiency and overall language education in Nepal. By incorporating interactive and collaborative activities, educators create a learning environment that enhances language proficiency while fostering empathy, self-awareness, and positive relationships. The choice of teaching method depends on the specific needs and context of the learners.

RESULTS

The study identifies key challenges and opportunities in teaching oral communication skills in ELT in Nepal, based on secondary data, existing literature, and the researchers' experiences. The findings reveal several areas for improvement, with a focus on barriers and strategies to enhance learners' oral proficiency. One of the major challenges is the reliance on traditional teaching methods in English language teaching in Nepal. These methods heavily focus on grammar-translation techniques, which emphasize grammar and vocabulary memorization. While these approaches may aid in building foundational knowledge, they limit learners' ability to communicate fluently in real-life contexts. The lack of attention to oral communication hinders the development of speaking skills, as students are not provided with enough opportunities to practice language use in authentic settings. Additionally, the lack of innovative teaching approaches in many ELT classrooms in Nepal significantly hinders the development of students' oral communication skills. Methods such as task-based learning, role plays, discussions, collaborative learning, group work, technology integration, and presentations are largely absent. These approaches are crucial as they promote active student participation, encourage peer learning, create opportunities for authentic language use, and enhance oral communication skills. However, their underutilization limits the overall effectiveness of language learning.

A major contributing factor to this issue is the inadequate training and resources available to teachers. Many educators in Nepal have limited exposure to communicative teaching methods and digital tools, often relying on traditional, teacher-centered approaches. This is particularly evident in rural areas, where schools face a shortage of teaching aids, digital tools, and multimedia resources. Traditional teacher training programs tend to focus on grammar, reading, and writing, leaving teachers ill-equipped to facilitate practical speaking activities. As a result, opportunities for students to engage in speaking tasks are scarce, further hindering their language development. As well as, classroom conditions also pose significant challenges. Overcrowded classrooms make it difficult for teachers to implement interactive teaching methods and provide personalized feedback. With large class sizes, students have fewer opportunities to actively participate in speaking tasks, and teachers struggle to monitor individual progress. Additionally, the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students often lead to code-switching, reducing immersion in English and further limiting opportunities for authentic language practice.

While some urban and semi-urban schools in Nepal have started integrating multimedia tools and performance-based assessments, such as presentations and group discussions, these practices remain limited in scope. To address the challenges in ELT classrooms, a concerted effort is needed to improve teacher training, provide adequate resources, and create more conducive learning

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environments that foster interactive and engaging language instruction. One of the key barriers is the curriculum's limited emphasis on oral communication, despite its critical importance in ELT contexts. The current curriculum prioritizes reading and writing skills, with speaking tasks often treated as supplementary rather than integral to language learning. This imbalance is further exacerbated by the fact that speaking skills are rarely assessed in formal examinations, leading students to prioritize written proficiency over spoken fluency. Additionally, the lack of digital resources and poor internet connectivity in many areas makes it challenging to incorporate modern, technology-driven teaching methods.

The findings of this study emphasize the significant barriers to effective oral communication instruction in Nepalese ESL classrooms but also highlight opportunities for improvement. By adopting innovative, interactive, and communicative teaching practices, educators can create a more dynamic learning environment that enhances students' oral communication skills. Utilizing diverse methods and techniques can maximize engagement, understanding, and retention in second language learning contexts. These insights call for a shift in English Language Teaching (ELT) practices to better address oral communication skills. Improving teacher training, reallocating resources, and revising the curriculum to include more communicative and interactive methods are essential steps toward creating a more inclusive and effective learning environment. Such changes would not only address the current gaps but also align teaching practices with the broader goals of language education in Nepal.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study shed light on the critical challenges and opportunities in enhancing oral communication skills in ELT classrooms in Nepal. A key finding is the overreliance on traditional grammar-translation methods, which, combined with the limited emphasis on oral communication in the curriculum, has hindered students' ability to develop fluency and confidence in English. This aligns with studies such as those by Richards and Rodgers (2014), who argue that traditional methods often fail to prepare learners for real-world communication. The lack of innovative teaching approaches, such as task-based learning, role plays, and collaborative learning, further exacerbates the issue. These findings are consistent with Ellis (2003), who emphasizes the importance of interactive methods in promoting authentic language use and learner engagement.

The implications of these findings are significant. For educators, the study highlights the need to shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches that prioritize oral communication. Integrating technology, such as multimedia tools and digital platforms, can create more interactive and engaging lessons, particularly in resource-constrained settings. For policymakers, the findings underscore the importance of curriculum reform to include more speaking tasks and assessments, as well as the need for teacher training programs focused on communicative teaching methods. Such changes can bridge the gap between classroom instruction and real-world language use, equipping students with the skills needed for academic, social, and professional success. However, the study also acknowledges several limitations. First, the implementation of innovative strategies is often constrained by large class sizes and limited resources, particularly in rural areas. This challenge is echoed in studies by Kirkpatrick (2007), which highlight the difficulties of applying communicative language teaching (CLT) in low-resource contexts. The diverse linguistic backgrounds of students in Nepal present unique challenges for oral communication in English Language Teaching (ELT). Teachers often resort to code-switching—alternating between students' native languages and English—to ensure comprehension and maintain classroom engagement. While this practice can aid understanding, it reduces immersion in English, limiting students' exposure to authentic language use and hindering their oral proficiency development. This aligns with Giri's (2010) observation that multilingual classrooms require tailored strategies to balance native language use with English proficiency development.

To address the challenges posed by diverse linguistic backgrounds in Nepalese ESL classrooms, integrating empathy and empowerment into English Language Teaching (ELT) practices can play a transformative role. Empathy enables teachers to understand the linguistic and cultural contexts of their students, fostering a supportive environment where learners feel safe to experiment with English without fear of judgment. This emotional support is essential for building confidence, especially for students who may feel overwhelmed by the complexities of a new language. Empowerment, on the other hand, involves providing students with the tools and opportunities to take ownership of their learning. For example, teachers can design activities that celebrate students' multilingual abilities while gradually encouraging greater use of English. Interactive methods such as role plays, group discussions, and collaborative projects can offer low-pressure platforms for students to practice speaking, creating an inclusive and engaging learning environment. By fostering empathy and empowerment, educators can cultivate a classroom culture that values linguistic diversity while progressively increasing students' exposure to and comfort with English. This approach not only enhances oral communication skills but also builds students' self-efficacy, motivating them to participate more actively in language learning. In this way, empathy and empowerment serve as foundational pillars for addressing the challenges of multilingual classrooms and promoting effective oral communication in ELT.

Finally, the study highlights that oral communication is often neglected in formal examinations, leading students to prioritize written skills over spoken fluency. This finding aligns with Littlewood's (2007) argument that assessment practices significantly influence teaching priorities and student motivation. To address this, incorporating oral communication assessments into the curriculum is

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essential. By valuing and evaluating speaking skills, educators can encourage a more balanced development of language proficiency, ensuring that students are better prepared for real-world communication. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights that align with and expand upon existing research. For instance, the emphasis on empathy and empowerment as key components of a supportive learning environment is consistent with the principles of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), as discussed by Zins et al. (2004). By fostering a classroom culture that values emotional and social development alongside academic growth, educators can create a more inclusive and motivating environment for language learning. Additionally, the study's focus on innovative strategies, such as gamification and collaborative learning, builds on the work of Deterding et al. (2011) and Johnson et al. (1998), who highlight the benefits of interactive and game-based approaches in education. In contrast to some existing studies, this research specifically addresses the unique challenges of the Nepalese context, such as resource constraints and linguistic diversity, offering practical solutions tailored to these conditions. While studies like those by Nunan (1999) advocate for task-based learning in ESL education, this study provides a nuanced understanding of how such methods can be adapted to resource-limited settings. Furthermore, the study's emphasis on teacher training and professional development aligns with but extends beyond the findings of Borg (2006), which stress the importance of continuous teacher support in implementing communicative approaches.

The study provides a comprehensive understanding of the barriers to and opportunities for enhancing oral communication skills in ESL classrooms in Nepal. By addressing these challenges through innovative teaching strategies, curriculum reform, and teacher training, educators can create a more dynamic and inclusive learning environment. While the study has limitations, its findings contribute valuable insights to the broader discourse on ELT education, particularly in resource-constrained and multilingual contexts. These recommendations have the potential to transform language teaching practices, not only in Nepal but also in similar settings worldwide, ultimately empowering learners to succeed in a globally connected world.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research highlights the key challenges and opportunities for improving oral communication skills in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms in Nepal. It shows how traditional teaching methods, lack of focus on speaking skills, and issues like large class sizes, limited resources, and insufficient teacher training have made it hard for students to become fluent and confident in English. However, the research also points to positive changes, especially in urban and semi-urban areas, where new teaching methods like using technology, gamification, interactive learning, role-play, group work, project-based learning, and structured presentations are starting to help.

The study, based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), emphasizes the importance of empathy and empowerment in creating a supportive classroom environment. Empathy helps students grow both linguistically and emotionally, while empowerment boosts their confidence and participation. Despite the challenges, the research suggests practical solutions, such as updating the curriculum to focus more on oral communication, improving teacher training in interactive teaching methods, investing in digital tools, and creating policies to reduce class sizes and improve resources. These strategies aim to make classrooms more inclusive and engaging, supporting both language learning and emotional development.

Additionally, the study offers valuable insights for similar contexts around the world, showing how to address common challenges in language teaching. Future research should focus on how effective these new teaching methods are in the long term, how curriculum changes affect students, and how multilingualism can play a role in ELT classrooms. Ultimately, this research calls for a collaborative approach to improving oral communication teaching, ensuring that students are not only good at speaking English but also confident and capable in academic, professional, and social situations. By applying these strategies, Nepal can improve its ELT system and prepare students for success in a more connected world.

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