ICT in the Classroom: English Teachers' Perceptions and Practices

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Abstract: Along with the advancement of all other facets of human life, teaching and learning of English language at all levels have become easier because of the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Technology has expanded the practices of English language teaching beyond the four walls of the class today. Many researchers have highlighted the necessity of ICTs in teaching English in the global context. The present study, using interviews and a group discussion, explores how teachers perceive the use of ICTs and make use of them in bachelor-level English language classrooms in Nepal. Although the findings of the present study are idiosyncratic, they are consistent with the life world of English language education in global contexts. The results showed that the use of ICTs in English language classrooms is the most crucial factor for developing language skills after the teachers themselves in the 21st century. The study showed that the knowledge of ICTs helped teachers make lesson plans, prepare teaching materials, implement lessons, engage students in readily available language tasks, and evaluate them. However, the results also revealed that teachers and some students' inefficiency in using modern ICT tools, frequent power cuts, and inconsistent internet services as the obstacles to ICT-friendly pedagogical practices. The findings of this study will be helpful to English teachers in planning their lessons, implementing them for the improvement of their students' English language skills, and evaluating their tasks.

Introduction

I remember my English teacher, in my bachelor's level studies, taking us to Butwal Municipality in 1997 in order to demonstrate an overhead projector (OHP) as one of the teaching aids. The teaching-learning process used to be limited to teachers' lectures and textbooks in every class, and there were no computers, projectors, or printers in my college. So, the teacher wanted us to introduce it to OHP as a teaching aid. However, the paradigm has shifted today in that students have become more acquainted with technology that facilitates learning. According to Nepal Telecommunication Authority, 2012, November 22, the first government IT Policy 2000 aimed to incorporate information technology (IT) into educational institutions for various purposes (Rana & Rana, 2020). Since then, the rapid growth of information and communication technology (ICT) and its use in teaching have brought about changes in language classrooms (Nur et al., 2021). Both teachers and students have access to the internet on their computers, laptops, or mobile phones, which they can easily make use of in teaching and learning at their will.

Along with the advancement of ICT, teachers have started keeping themselves abreast of pedagogical changes in that they have adopted student-centered teaching-learning activities. They have shifted from the "chalk and talk" or lecture method to ICT-based, student-centered instruction. Thapaliya (2014) states that ICTs ensure greater access to and participation in the means of communication for all levels of students today. Along with their prescribed textbooks and reference study materials in libraries, students get an excess supply of study materials through ICT tools and the internet. ICTs enable learners to use those resources anytime at their will and make them more critical, analytical, creative, and productive (Thapaliya, 2014). The use of ICT enables them to learn in more natural ways through readily available online or downloaded books, articles, magazines, and audio/visual materials on their laptops, mobile phones, or computers.

ICT has become an inseparable part of classroom teaching as well as all other areas, transforming significant aspects of people's lives. In comparison to traditional

memorization methods, the proper use of ICT tools makes teaching and learning easier and more comfortable (Bhandari, 2020). The use of ICT in teaching in Nepal began when the Ministry of Education (MoE), with technical and financial support from USAID, launched the Radio Education Teacher Training Project (RETTP) in 1978 (Dixit, 2009) to help teachers upgrade their educational qualifications in the rural parts of the nation (Bhandari, 2020). Today, teachers use ICT for searching for teaching materials, preparing lesson plans, classroom teaching, and student evaluations in order to offer better educational outputs. ADB (2015) states that the use of ICT facilitates education by transforming it and linking experiential learning to socioeconomic development.

The knowledge and skills of ICT have enabled teachers to transform themselves academically in order to help their students transform for the better (Dhital, 2018). However, Rana and Rana (2020) reported that the teaching and learning practices in Nepal are still traditional, despite the high importance placed by the government of Nepal on implementing a strong policy to integrate ICT into education. The output is still unsatisfactory despite the government, educational institutions, and educators' personal-level initiatives in enhancing students' ICT-integrated English language learning. In this context, this study explored teachers' perceptions towards and practices of using ICT in teaching English in Nepal in order to promote student-centered learning.

Literature Review

The use of ICTs has been used for developing study materials, delivering course content, student evaluation, academic research, and other general purposes in higher education. However, the rural parts of Nepal are still behind in their use of education. There are several obstacles in the way of less developed countries joining the rest of the world in reaping the abundant benefits of the present information age (Nworgu & Didiugwu, 2008). Although some universities and colleges have started integrating ICT into education, many of them have not yet developed systematic use of digital technologies in their educational programs (Rana, 2018). Since the classrooms are still technologically under-resourced, most teachers and students are still illiterate or have

little knowledge of ICT in their pedagogical practices. Hence, becoming an English language teacher in an under-resourced rural context is challenging (Gnawali, 2018) with respect to updating oneself with ICT. The following section offers a review of the literature on bachelor-level English teachers' perceptions and practices of ICT integration in their English language classrooms.

Teachers' pedagogical perception and practices of ICT

Every aspect of life is rapidly adopting digital media and information. The use of ICT has helped in transforming the practices and procedures of all forms of venture within education, business, governance, and personal life (Rana & Rana, 2020). The studies carried out by Rana et al. (2019) reported that the integration of ICT in education has expanded its influence not only to more influential full-time learning but also to part-time as well as distance learning in higher education. The technology has helped internationalize and commercialize higher education (Rana, 2020) by offering multiple and flexible teaching and learning options.

The use of ICT increases the scope of teaching, offers quality learning materials in an autonomous learning environment, and increases learning opportunities (Almekhlafi and Abulibdeh, 2018). Teachers can adapt appropriate applications and online materials for their teaching assignments; however, it is the teachers' ability to integrate ICT into their teaching and create interactive and fun-learning activities that are important (Nur et al., 2021). This indicates that teachers need to update themselves by incorporating ICT into their pedagogies in order to bring positive change to their classroom practices.

The ICT-integrated pedagogy has shifted classroom practices by making it possible for teachers to share the issues of educational disparity and social exclusion both in synchronous and asynchronous classroom settings. However, Internet penetration has reached only 44.11 per cent of the total population in Nepal (Ghimire, 2020), and this expansion has been centered in the urban areas. This has compelled most teachers and students in rural areas to be still away from access to the Internet and

other ICT devices despite the government's initiation of launching e-governance in the country with the 'National Informatics Law 2067' (Acharya, 2014).

The integration of ICT in teaching English has gained much importance in recent years, and the Nepalese ELT is no exception. ICT has become an integral part of classroom instruction in general and teaching English in particular. Technology can help teachers plan and deliver lessons, engage students in learning tasks and activities, evaluate students, conduct research about pedagogical improvements, and help students develop critical thinking (Harrell & Bynum, 2018). Teachers' attitudes and enthusiasm play a vital role in integrating ICT into teaching. Research carried out by Teo (2008) demonstrated that pre-service teachers in Singapore are more positive regarding ICT use than their control of the ICT tools in English language classrooms. However, due to a lack of proper knowledge of ICT use and a lack of desire to keep up with changing trends in pedagogical practices, traditional chalk-and-talk methods are still used in classrooms.

Though there are ample studies on the effectiveness of ICT in higher education, there is very little literature on university-level teachers' perceptions and practices of technology in teaching English in the context of Nepal. Hence, this study explores English language teachers' perceptions towards and practices of ICT in teaching English in bachelor-level classrooms in the Nepalese context.

Methodology

In this qualitative study, I used employed interviews. This research is intended to explore information about teachers' perceptions and practices of ICT integration in English teaching. First, I piloted my interview questions on eight English teachers teaching in bachelor-level classrooms and purposively selected three English teachers from three UGC-accredited colleges in Rupandehi for this research. All three participants were experienced in teaching English and Business Communication for more than ten years as permanent faculty members; showed a reasonable understanding of ICT-integrated teaching, and were interested in sharing their experiences of using technology in teaching.

I followed my research participants with semi-structured interviews (Cohen et al., 2011) to explore their perceptions towards using ICT in teaching and their practices of integrating technology in teaching English (Rana & Rana, 2020). To achieve the purpose of the study, I first set some guiding unstructured and open-ended questions which included: how do you perceive the use of technology in teaching English? Could you share your experience of using technology in planning and teaching lessons, and evaluating students? What kind of challenges have you experienced in using technology? How do you mitigate those challenges in your classroom?

After I developed a good rapport with the participants through informal meetings, I started with real information-seeking interviews. I assured them that I would give them pseudo-names to maintain their confidentiality concerning their identity and information. On every visit, I let my participants speak freely regarding their perceptions and practices in the unstoppable situation until I obtained the saturated information for this study.

I delimited the study in purpose and methodology in that this study intended to explore bachelor-level English teachers' perceptions of ICT and their practices of using ICT in planning, teaching, and evaluating students in the Rupandehi district. And I used the semi-structured interview to explore my research participants' lived experiences of using technology in teaching English language. Therefore, there is still more to explore regarding ICT integration in teaching English in the future, and some of the areas may include: ICT integration in syllabus designing and curricular planning as well as exploring more on planning, teaching, and evaluation at school level classroom teaching.

Findings and Discussion

English Teachers' Attitudes towards ICT-integrated Classrooms

This section provides the findings and discussion of the information on teachers' attitudes. In line with Nur et al. (2021), I presented the information obtained from interviews according to the participants' attitude categories: the attitude towards the

ICT integration in the English language classroom; the attitude towards the influence of ICT; and the attitude towards the teaching process.

The unstructured interviews with the participants revealed that the teachers hold positive perceptions towards using ICT in teaching English. Their expressions revealed that if teachers use technology in the right way, they can facilitate their students' ability to prepare and present lessons and evaluate their learning effectively. All the participant teachers stated, "I am very positive about the use of ICT in teaching and learning English." Two teachers (T1 and T3) even said, *"ICT should be integrated into all the bachelor-level courses as a part of teaching, not just a teaching tool."* Elaborating on why she was positive towards ICT use in her class, one teacher (T2) stated:

> *Although I was reluctant to learn computer and internet skills a few years ago, I feel much more comfortable using these tools in my class now. The college has also supported all teachers in buying laptops and training us to use them in class. I think every school should do this to empower their teachers with recent pedagogical skills.*

Similarly, during the follow-up interview, two teachers (T2, T3) articulated:

> *Now, I believe that incorporating ICT into the teaching of English and other subjects is critical because it not only makes classrooms more interactive than our one-way lectures, but also makes it easier for us to process grades, especially when making students' internal evaluations.*

Similarly, T1 and T3 expressed that their students' active participation in ICT-integrated classroom activities makes them more energetic towards using and advocating the benefits of using ICT in English language classrooms.

Based on the information collected through interviews, ICT was an inevitable component of pedagogical practices in general and especially for teachers to prepare themselves to adapt to changing pedagogical paradigms in teaching English. Many studies (Nur et al., 2021; Thapaliya, 2014; Rana, 2018; Rana & Rana, 2020) have shown that teachers have a positive attitude toward incorporating ICT in classrooms,

which benefits some aspects of English learning. Moreover, the teachers showed high enthusiasm for learning to use ICT by investing in ICT tools and time for training outside of their regular class hours. This indicated that the teachers showed alertness and understanding of how essential ICT was in supporting teaching and learning activities. They also took the position that ICT must be integrated into learning activities. The results also showed that the teachers' positive attitude towards the influence of ICT integration in teaching English impacted positively their students. To elucidate this, all three teachers stated:

> *Since I learned to make use of ICT and started teaching English using these tools, even the laziest students have shown high motivation and interest in participating in language learning tasks such as writing business letters, curriculum vitae, or meeting minutes.*

Adding their positive perception towards it, one of the teachers (T3) stated, "*The use of the internet and laptop computers has helped me a lot in preparing my students to confidently participate in presentation competitions."* In line with his idea, another teacher (T2) added, "*I have been able to use YouTube videos to teach authentic pronunciation of English sounds as well*." All three teachers agreed that learning becomes more realistic. In a study carried out by Brordbar (2010), it was also reported that Iranian English teachers held a positive attitude toward using ICT in teaching the English language. According to the findings, participants perceived the use of ICT as a desirable component to assist students in motivating themselves to learn English in a more authentic and non-threatening environment.

For the attitudes towards ICT in teaching, the analysis showed that the participants were positive towards integrating ICT in teaching English to support students' English language learning. The teachers perceived that the use of ICT in English language teaching was essential to reform teaching techniques (Nur et al., 2021) and transform students at the university level. One of the teachers (T2) compared her own teaching techniques before and after she became ICT-literate, saying, "I used to memorize all the points to discuss in class before, but now I can use my lesson

preparation time to design more effective language tasks for my students." In a similar vein, the other two teachers (T1 and T2) also focused on the importance of learning ICT for their regular existence in the teaching profession. Their attitude toward ICT in English teaching is consistent with that of many other authors (Nur et al., 2021; Rana & Rana, 2020; & Cakici, 2016), who claim that ICT makes the English language environment interactive, flexible, and innovative. The teachers claimed that each teacher should be able to use computers and other ICT tools if they want to remain in the teaching profession.

ICT Integration in English Language Classrooms

This section investigated the practices of ICT integration in English language classrooms by bachelor's level English teachers. It addresses two issues: ICT-integrated lesson planning and classroom teaching, as well as issues with integrating ICT in English teaching (electricity and slow or no internet, student absenteeism, expensive tools and a lack of technicians at the college, and the inefficiency of both teachers and students in using ICT). The analysis result showed that the teachers' practices in ICT-integrated learning were not yet optimally implemented, and hence both teachers and students require more updates of knowledge related to the application and integration of ICT for a more effective teaching-learning process (Nur et al., 2001; Maru et al., 2021).

ICT integration in teaching English refers to how teachers use ICT tools to plan lessons and execute them while maintaining the authenticity of the materials (Mura et al., 2021). Based on the interview analysis, the most visible use of technology-enhanced teaching was the opportunity for independent access to lesson planning and study materials. Speaking about their experiences of using technology in English teaching, two teachers (T1 and T3) stated, *"When I learned to search for, download, and modify lesson plan templates and study materials as per the level, need, and interest of my students, I started feeling professionally blessed."* Similarly, another teacher (T2), *revealing her weaknesses in using ICT tools, stated:*

> *Initially, I used to simply copy the text into PowerPoint slides, display them on the classroom wall, and read them to the students. However, when I enrolled in the MPhil program at Kathmandu University's School of Education, I discovered all of this. "Now I get most of my students engaged in presentations as well as group discussions.*

Technology offers both teachers and students the opportunity to download teaching resources and use authentic native speakers' audio and video in language classrooms (Bhandari, 2020; Rana, 2018). In terms of teaching materials, most teachers showed satisfactory practices of ICT integration in English classrooms because the internet provides rich resources in many kinds of formats, such as e-books, articles, ready-to-use authentic materials, lesson plans, and online learning programs (Nur et al., 2021). Adding to online programs, T3 stated, "*My students and I also completed a few online courses offered by Coursera and the British Council websites, but still I need to learn more to adapt the fully ICT-integrated teaching.*" The findings align with Kern's (1995) assertion that proper use of ICT changes teacher-student interactions such that there are fewer teachers and more learner talk in computer classes. The other two teachers (T1 and T2) also mentioned that the British Council is their favorite English language learning platform, from which they download lesson plan samples, evaluation sheets of grammar, guided essays and paragraphs, and videos of conversations to use in their classrooms.

While discussing the internet facility, all the teachers expressed their dissatisfaction that the inefficient internet service often made it difficult for them to search for and present lessons in their classes. During a discussion regarding the teachers' difficulties in using ICT in his classroom, one of the teachers (T1) said, "*The compulsion to use a projector in class made me learn technology, but most of the students come from rural areas and they can't use these tools, so it makes it difficult to engage them in ICT-based activities.*" Similarly, adding to T1's statement, T3 added, "*Nearly half of my students don't even have their smartphones, and they are also reluctant to learn computer skills in their free time at college*." In the same vein, all the

teachers shared their mixed practices of using emails and Google Classrooms for sharing information, websites and blogs for searching for information, and laptops and projectors for presenting their lessons. Unsurprisingly, almost all use social media, such as Facebook and Messenger. However, they only used them for teaching purposes in difficult circumstances. T2 and T3 stated, *"I only used Facebook and Messenger to convey messages to my students during the COVID-19 pandemic."* This indicates that the use of e-learning applications is still limited. When compared to the ICT development continuum, their use of software was still at a lower level of application.

All three teachers shared that their colleges have developed well-equipped ICT labs, but only a few students seem interested in spending their study time in labs. Talking about the students' absence in the ICT labs, the teachers mentioned, *"Some of my students go to jobs as soon as they finish their classes in the morning, so they cannot spend the daytime in the lab or library." And this compels me to provide students with ready-made notes.* Sharing the inability to engage students in varieties of language activities in the labs, T2 stated, "*We have a good computer lab, but I am fed up with frequent internet disturbances during my lab and class times with the students." "What's more, I have often used my hotspot in my class."*

Based on the interview analysis, it can be further elaborated that although the colleges developed well-equipped computer labs for educational purposes, the frequent interruptions of the internet disturbed the spontaneity of the class and forced the teachers to use their own hotspots (Rodliyah, 2018). Similarly, the findings also align with Nur et al.'s (2021) finding that, despite the teachers' positive attitude and awareness towards ICT in education, they have only partially been able to integrate technology in their English language classes.

ICT Integration in Student Evaluation

ICT can be used in student evaluation in several ways. Gipps (2005) emphasized the use of online discussion boards for discussions to ask and address learning issues and emails for teachers to assign tasks and provide feedback on students' assignments. The findings revealed that the teachers occasionally used ICT during the COVID-19

pandemic; however, they started using a mix of traditional paper-and-pencil tests as well as ICT tools for evaluation after the new normal. Two of my research participants (T1 & T3) stated, *"Dealing with individual emails is time-consuming, so I assign homework and project work on Google Classroom, and my students submit the tasks." It makes checking and marking easier."* However, T2 showed her inability to use Google Classroom efficiently, so she stated, *"I am not much habituated to using Google Classroom, although I post study materials on it." I enjoy correcting their tasks in ink."* The findings were consistent with Gipps' (2005) study, which proposed using a hybrid model of ICT-based and traditional modes of assessment to address the needs of both ICT-friendly teachers and students.

The study suggested that the teachers faced challenges in integrating ICT into teaching and evaluating their students. One of the teachers (T2) stated, *"I sometimes feel inferior before the students when I fail to adjust very simple things like a projector when it's blurry, and at the same time, I can't contact the technician at college."* Another teacher (T3) also focused on the fact that she needed more training to operate all necessary devices used in planning lessons, teaching, and evaluating students. However, T1 expressed his confidence in using ICT in teaching English with a high level of student participation. Hence, the findings demand both teachers' self-initiation (Rana & Rana, 2020) as well as the provision of training for ICT-integrated teaching and evaluation (Bhandari, 2020; Alkamel & Chouthaiwale, 2018). In line with Rana and Rana (2020), the findings revealed that the currently available ICT facilities are insufficient to enable English language teachers to integrate technology into teaching English. However, despite difficult circumstances such as unstable internet and electricity, expensive tools, insufficient knowledge to operate ICT tools, insufficient training, and students' negligence to some extent, the highly positive attitude towards integrating ICT in teaching English and practices persisted.

Conclusions

The teachers' perceptions towards ICT integration in English language classrooms were positive. They perceived that ICT enhances not only students' learning

but also makes teachers more capable of delivering their lessons in multiple different ways. The result showed that, despite their weaknesses in using ICT efficiently, the teachers had high awareness of how ICT contributed to engaging students in more student-centered learning, evaluation and enhancing students' confidence levels. The discussion also identified some problems and possibilities of integrating ICT in teaching English in bachelor-level community schools in the context of Nepal. Despite the teachers' personal initiation, the lack of proper training to update English teachers with recent English language practices and an unstable power supply and internet connection are found to be major problems for effectively incorporating ICT in English language teaching at the bachelor level in community colleges. Both teachers' and students' poor ICT knowledge and skills have wedged the expected effective integration of technology in teaching English. The teachers found it more challenging to teach the students who attend the classes without even a basic knowledge of ICT.

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