
Improving English Pronunciation Among Doteli-Speaking Students

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Abstract

English pronunciation is important for the development of communicative competence of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. However, learners from linguistically diverse communities of Nepal experience considerable difficulties in pronunciation due to interference from their first language, limited exposure to English, and limited instructional resources. I have conducted this qualitative action research on the effectiveness of collaborative multimodal instructional strategies in improving the English pronunciation of Doteli-speaking students of a community school of Doti District, Nepal. I conducted it with 34 students of grades 8- 10 who speak Doteli. I collected data using classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, students' written work, and the researcher's reflective journal. Moreover, the action research cycle of problem identification, planning, intervention, observation, and reflection. I analyzed data using thematic analysis supported by triangulation and member checking to enhance the credibility of the data. The analysis revealed three interrelated themes. The students continued to have pronunciation problems mainly because of mother-tongue interference, limited exposure to English, and low confidence in oral communication. Secondly, lack of teaching resources and limited opportunities for meaningful interaction restricted pronunciation development. Thirdly, the use of collaborative multimodal instructional strategies, i.e pronunciation modelling, peer-assisted learning, vocabulary puzzles, phonetic reinforcement, and visual learning materials, led to significant improvements in students' pronunciation accuracy, classroom participation, and confidence in speaking English. The findings suggested that contextually appropriate, learner-centered instructional interventions can effectively support pronunciation development in resource-constrained educational settings and illustrate the value of action research as a reflective approach to enhancing classroom practice. English pronunciation learning by Doteli-speaking students through collaborative learning and action research.

Keywords: action research, collaborative learning, Doteli-speaking students, English pronunciation.

Introduction

English is one of the most influential international languages in education, employment, scientific communication and global mobility. In multilingual countries like Nepal, English is a compulsory subject from the primary level and plays an important role as an academic and professional medium. Thus, the ability to communicate effectively in English has become more and more crucial for learners in different educational settings. Of the four language skills, speaking is usually considered the most immediate index of communicative competence because it allows learners to express their ideas, exchange information and participate actively in academic and social interaction (Ellis, 1997). But efficient oral communication depends not only on grammar knowledge and vocabulary but also on the intelligibility of pronunciation.

Pronunciation is an essential part of communicative competence because it has a direct impact on intelligibility and successful communication. Poor pronunciation often leads to breakdowns in communication, decreased confidence, and a disinclination to participate in classroom activities. Although perfect, native-like pronunciation may not be the ultimate goal of second language acquisition, intelligible pronunciation is essential for successful communication and meaningful engagement in academic contexts (Mora & Mora-Plaza, 2023). Therefore, more attention has been paid to pronunciation instruction in English language teaching, especially in multilingual contexts where learners' first languages affect the way they produce English sounds.

However, pronunciation is one of the least emphasized components in English language teaching in many community schools in Nepal. In classroom instruction, the emphasis is often placed on grammar, reading comprehension, and examination preparation, with comparatively little attention paid to systematic practice in pronunciation. The gap is even wider in remote and poor resource areas where students are not exposed to real communication in English and have limited opportunities to practice oral English out of the classroom. Such a context was the origin of the present study. It was done in Sudurpashchim Province, Doti District, where Doteli is the language spoken by most of the people in daily communication. Doteli has unique phonological features which are quite different from English. Therefore, a large number of learners experience continuous pronunciation difficulties due to first language transfer. The sounds available in English but unavailable in Doteli are often substituted with the familiar sounds of the native language. This affects the intelligibility and the confidence of the learners in oral communication. These pronunciation difficulties are

compounded by limited instructional resources, lack of exposure to spoken English and teacher centred instructional practices common to rural schools.

In my role as an English teacher in this context, I observed repeatedly that many students were reluctant to participate in oral activities in the classroom, although they demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Students often mispronounced familiar English words, refrained from reading aloud, and reported anxiety when asked to communicate orally. Classroom observations and informal conversations indicated that these difficulties extended beyond language limitations and were closely related to the learners' confidence, motivation and limited opportunities. Action research is a suitable methodology to solve such problems in the classroom as it enables teachers to identify problems in their own practice, implement interventions appropriate to their context, observe the effectiveness of interventions, and continuously improve their teaching practices through systematic reflection.

Action research, unlike traditional experimental research, aims at practical solutions to authentic educational problems and contributes to professional development and improved teaching practices. In this regard, the present study used collaborative multimodal instructional strategies to improve the English pronunciation of Doteli speaking learners. These strategies included teacher modelling, peer-assisted learning, phonetic reinforcement, vocabulary puzzles, visual learning aids, collaborative pronunciation activities and ongoing feedback in the classroom. The intervention embraced multiple modes of learning instead of concentrating on isolated pronunciation drills to foster student engagement and reduce learner anxiety when speaking English.

The study was guided by the following research question:-

What impact does collaborative multimodal instructional strategies have on English pronunciation of Doteli-speaking students in community schools of Nepal?

To address this question, the study had the following aims:-

- a. To find out the major pronunciation problems of Doteli speaking students in learning English.
- b. To determine the factors responsible for pronunciation difficulties in a community school with limited resources.
- c. To implement collaborative multimodal instructional strategies for improving students' English pronunciation.
- d. To explore students' views and experiences of the intervention and the impact it has on their confidence and participation in the classroom.

The significance of this study goes beyond the immediate classroom. First, it offers empirical evidence to English language teachers in multilingual and under-resourced educational contexts on how Learner- Centered instructional strategies can support pronunciation development without costly technological resources. Second, this study helps contribute to the small body of research on pronunciation instruction for speakers of indigenous languages in Nepal, particularly those whose first language is very different from English. The paper concludes with an account of an action research approach that demonstrates how teachers can systematically investigate and resolve classroom problems, develop interventions that are relevant to their context, and improve their own pedagogical practices through reflective inquiry.

Literature Review

English Pronunciation in ELT

Pronunciation is one of the most important components of communicative competence in English language teaching (ELT). Grammar and vocabulary enable learners to construct meaningful messages but it is pronunciation that determines if or not these messages are understood by listeners. Consequently pronunciation is no longer an optional component of language learning, but rather an integral part of effective oral communication. Second language pedagogy is currently oriented towards intelligibility instead of native-like pronunciation, considering that learners need to develop their pronunciation to achieve effective communication in different linguistic contexts (Mora & Mora-Plaza, 2023). Pronunciation is a combination of several interrelated linguistic features including segmental phonemes (vowels and consonants), stress, rhythm, intonation, connected speech, and supra-segmental features, all of which are essential for the comprehensibility of speech. Research has consistently shown that even when people have sufficient grammatical knowledge and vocabulary, inaccurate pronunciation can be a communication barrier (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011).

As a consequence, pronunciation instruction should be a part of routine classroom practice, not a separate language component. In the history of teaching languages, different methods have paid more or less attention to pronunciation. The Grammar-Translation Method was not concerned with the spoken language and the Audio-Lingual Method concentrated on repetition and habit formation by means of intensive pronunciation drills (George, 1972). Most recently, Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Language Teaching have promoted meaningful communication by integrating pronunciation in real communicative activities. These learner-centred approaches acknowledge that pronunciation is best developed when

learners are engaged in purposeful interaction, supported by explicit instructional guidance. These pedagogical developments have occurred, but pronunciation remains one of the least systematically taught components of language in many English classrooms, especially in developing countries where the examination-driven system of teaching often emphasizes grammar and reading comprehension. Thus, learners do not have enough opportunities to develop oral fluency and pronunciation accuracy, which causes communication anxiety and less classroom participation.

Factors Affecting the Development of English Pronunciation

Research has shown that a number of interrelated factors impact on the development of learners' pronunciation in second-language acquisition. Among these, the first language transfer, instructional quality, learner motivation, exposure to authentic language input, and age have been the subjects of much academic interest.

First Language Interferences

One of the strongest predictors of pronunciation difficulty is the influence of learners' first language. According to Fledge et al. (1999), learners have a tendency to perceive unfamiliar sounds in terms of the phonological system of their first language. Some English phonemes do not exist in the learners' first language and are often substituted by more familiar ones, leading to systematic pronunciation errors. This phenomenon is of particular relevance in the context of multi-lingual societies like Nepal where students learn English after they have learnt their mother tongue. Doteli, like many other indigenous languages spoken in western Nepal, has phonological patterns that are quite different from English. As a result, Doteli-speaking learners have difficulty in producing several English consonants, vowels, consonant clusters, stress patterns and final consonants. The language differences result in not only mispronunciation but also in lower self-confidence in oral communication.

English Exposure

Development of pronunciation depends to a large extent on meaningful experience with spoken English. According to Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, language is acquired when learners are provided with comprehensible input that is just slightly beyond their present level of proficiency. However, in rural Nepal, students are often introduced to English only in the classroom. Opportunities to hear authentic English pronunciation outside of school are extremely scarce through media, social interaction, and community engagement. The lack of exposure to real language input lowers the opportunities for the learners to internalize English phonological patterns. As

a result, the learning of pronunciation is heavily reliant on classroom instruction, which puts a lot of responsibility on teachers to create rich oral language environments.

Motivation and Students' Confidence

The acquisition of pronunciation is affected by not only linguistic knowledge but also by psychological characteristics of learners. Motivated learners are more likely to practice speaking, take communicative risks and persevere in the face of pronunciation errors, according to Gardner and Masgoret (2003). On the other hand, fear of negative evaluation usually causes learners to avoid oral participation, which decreases the chances of improving pronunciation. Further research also shows that learners often develop pronunciation anxiety when they think English is difficult or they are afraid of being made fun of by their classmates. This anxiety impacts the classroom participation and may eventually hinder communicative competence. Therefore, teaching pronunciation needs to establish positive learning environments where mistakes are accepted as a part of the language learning process.

Teaching in the Classroom

Teachers play a big role in the development of pronunciation. Brown and Lee (2015) suggest that pronunciation instruction should not be restricted to isolated drills but should be woven into all language skills. Effective pronunciation instruction involves explicit modeling, guided practice, immediate corrective feedback, meaningful interaction and repeated opportunities for oral production. Innovative instructional strategies are of added importance in resource-limited classrooms. Collaborative learning, visual aids, phonetic symbols, pronunciation games, vocabulary puzzles and peer-assisted activities have been shown to have positive effects on learner engagement and pronunciation accuracy. Such multimodal approaches acknowledge that learners need to engage with pronunciation through more than one sense rather than relying only on teacher explanation.

Collaborative Multimodal Language Instruction.

Multimodal instruction involves the use of various modes of learning, including visual, auditory, verbal, textual, and kinesthetic activities, to promote meaningful language learning. Research in education currently suggests that students learn better when they engage with the material through different learning experiences rather than just through traditional lecture-based learning. In teaching English pronunciation, multimodal instruction can involve teacher modeling, peer discussion, pronunciation charts and phonetic symbols, vocabulary games and collaborative tasks, visual images and gestures, and repeated oral practice. These pedagogical approaches reduce the

cognitive load of learning unfamiliar sound systems, while at the same time fostering active learner engagement. Moreover, collaborative learning promotes pronunciation development through the negotiation of meaning, peer-feedback and oral communication in low-anxiety contexts. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism suggests that social interaction with more knowledgeable peers or teachers is most effective in promoting learning. Thus, collaborative activities provide learners with the opportunity to co-construct knowledge while being constantly supported. Furthermore, several empirical studies have indicated that collaborative pronunciation practice can nurture learners' confidence, communicative competence, and willingness to participate in classroom interaction. Rather than treating learners as passive recipients of knowledge, collaborative multimodal instruction encourages active participation, learner autonomy and reflective learning.

Research Gaps

Pronunciation has been widely studied in second language acquisition but there are still some important gaps especially in multilingual settings like Nepal. First, much of the research on pronunciation has been done in urban educational settings or countries where learners have relatively greater exposure to English. Relatively few studies have been conducted on pronunciation instruction for indigenous language speakers who are studying in rural community schools. Second, most of the existing Nepalese studies have been on English language teaching in relation to wider issues such as grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension or communicative language teaching. However, very little research has been conducted on the pronunciation difficulties of Doteli speaking learners, despite the stark contrast between the phonological systems of Doteli and English. Third, problems with pronunciation have often been pointed out in prior research, but without any systematic investigation into how classroom-based interventions can deal with these problems. However, there is little empirical evidence on the impact of collaborative multimodal instructional strategies on pronunciation development in resource-constrained educational settings. Finally, only a few studies have used action research to investigate pronunciation instruction. Action research enables teachers to investigate real problems in their classroom, act on interventions rooted in their context, assess the effectiveness of these interventions, and improve their teaching through ongoing reflection. Increased attention to action research can thus lead to practical knowledge that is directly applicable to classroom improvement. The present study aims to bridge the gaps by investigating the pronunciation difficulties encountered by Doteli-speaking learners and

evaluating the effectiveness of collaborative multimodal teaching strategies within a qualitative action research paradigm.

Theoretical Framework

I have used three complementary theoretical perspectives, which together explain pronunciation development in multilingual classrooms.

Social Constructionism

The primary theoretical lens that informs this research is Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivist Theory. Social constructivism argues that learning occurs through interaction, collaboration, and guided participation in meaningful social contexts. Knowledge is not passed from teacher to learner, but is co-constructed through dialogue, cooperation and shared experience. The idea of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is especially relevant for pronunciation teaching. Learners find it hard to pronounce unfamiliar English sounds by themselves, but they can do it when the teacher models, they interact with their peers and they participate in collaborative learning activities. Thus, the improvement of pronunciation is seen as a socially mediated process instead of an individual cognitive activity. The collaborative group activities used in this action research are consistent with social constructivism because they allow learners to practice pronunciation collaboratively, negotiate meaning, receive immediate feedback and achieve increasing degrees of communicative confidence.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis

Krashen (1982) Input Hypothesis also supports the instructional design of this study. Krashen says language acquisition takes place when learners receive input that is comprehensible and slightly above their current competence. Pronunciation is developed by repeated exposure to meaningful spoken language in low anxiety learning environments. Teacher modelling, repeated listening activities, phonetic reinforcement and visual learning materials were therefore included in the intervention to increase learners' exposure to comprehensible spoken English. The study aimed to reduce the affective filter of learners and promote active oral participation through supportive classroom interactions.

Action Research as Reflective Professional Practice

The methodological basis of this study is the action research model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). Action research considers teachers to be reflective practitioners who systematically investigate classroom problems, implement interventions and observe outcomes and refine instructional practices through iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The purpose of action research is to

achieve practical improvements in teaching and learning, rather than to generate abstract theoretical knowledge. This view is in line with the present study, which aimed not only at understanding the challenges of pronunciation but also at enhancing classroom practice through collaborative multimodal instructional strategies. The potential of the collaborative instructional practices to improve English pronunciation among Doteli-speaking learners in resource-constrained community schools is underpinned by a coherent theoretical framework that integrates Social Constructivism, Krashen's Input Hypothesis and the Action Research Cycle.

Research Methodology

This study is designed as a qualitative action research to explore and improve English pronunciation of Doteli speaking students of a community school in Doti District, Nepal. The action research methodology was selected as the most appropriate approach as it enabled teachers to identify real-life problems in the classroom, apply interventions specific to their context, evaluate their effectiveness, and improve instructional practices through systematic reflection. In contrast to experimental research that aims primarily at establishing causal relationships, action research focuses on improving educational practice in a given context and at the same time generating practical knowledge for teachers. The study adopted the cyclical action research model by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), which consists of four interrelated phases: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This cyclical process enabled the researcher to diagnose students' pronunciation difficulties, design collaborative multimodal instructional strategies, observe changes in students' pronunciation and classroom participation, and reflect on the effectiveness of the intervention for future classroom improvement.

Research area

I conducted the study at Doti Technical Secondary School (DTSS), a community-based school in Doti District of Sudurpashchim Province, Nepal. The school caters to students mainly from the rural communities where Doteli is the common language of communication in day to day life. English is compulsory but opportunities to use English in real life situations are very limited. The school faces some contextual challenges common to rural community schools in Nepal, lack of instructional resources, lack of access to English reading materials, lack of technological facilities, and lack of exposure to spoken English outside of classroom instruction. Such contextual realities make the teaching of pronunciation a challenging aspect and warrant the need for intervention in the classroom through action research.

Participants

The participants were 34 Doteli-speaking students of Grades 8, 9 and 10 of Doti Technical Secondary School. The participants were selected through purposive sampling due to their persistent pronunciation difficulties during classroom instruction and shared linguistic background. Doteli was their first language, and English was the foreign language learned in school. The participants came from different levels of English proficiency but experienced the same problems in pronouncing English sounds, especially those sounds that are not present in the Doteli phonological system. Also, many students showed a reluctance in oral activities and a lack of self-confidence when reading English texts aloud. The classroom English teacher was the researcher as well, so the learning processes of students were constantly observed in the intervention. This dual role allowed for prolonged engagement with participants, and reflective journaling and triangulation were used to minimize potential researcher bias.

Action Research Cycle

The intervention was preceded by a full cycle of action research, consisting of four interconnected stages.

Stage One: Planning

The planning phase began with identification of students' pronunciation difficulties through regular classroom observation, informal chats, oral reading activities and analysis of students' classroom performance. Preliminary observations revealed that a large number of students experienced problems with English pronunciation as a result of mother-tongue interference, inadequate vocabulary, lack of exposure to spoken English, and low confidence in participating in the classroom. The problem was identified, and an intervention plan was developed which included collaborative multimodal instructional strategies to improve pronunciation accuracy and increase students' confidence in oral communication.

Stage Two: Perform

As a researcher, I employed a number of learner-Centered instructional strategies during the intervention period in the action phase. The strategies included: Teacher's explicit modelling of English pronunciation.

- Peer-assisted learning and collaborative group work.
- Word games and vocabulary quizzes.
- Phonetic reinforcement by means of pronunciation symbols.
- Picture-supported visual vocabulary cards.
- Oral reading activities with support.

- Ongoing pronunciation practice with immediate feedback.
 - Constant encouragement to participate in class discussions.
- Instead of using these activities as separate pronunciation exercises, they were integrated into regular English lessons.

Stage Three: Observation

Systematic observations were carried out throughout the intervention to examine students' participation, pronunciation accuracy, classroom interaction, confidence and engagement in oral activities. Students' written work, interview responses, focus group discussions, and the researcher's reflective journal supplemented classroom observations. The researcher was able to observe changes in students' learning behaviours throughout the intervention from multiple sources of evidence.

Stage Four: Reflection

Upon completion of the intervention, the researcher critically reflected on the effectiveness of the instructional strategies by comparing students' classroom performance before and after the intervention. Reflection consisted of finding the effective instructional activities, pronunciation issues, and potential changes in future teaching. The interpretation of the results was based on this reflection and the improvement of professional practice.

Data Collection Techniques

The qualitative action research design used multiple sources of evidence to get a comprehensive understanding of students' pronunciation development. The credibility of the findings was enhanced by using multiple methods (triangulation).

Observation in Classroom

The main data collection method was classroom observation. The researcher watched the students' pronunciation in oral reading, classroom discussion, group activities and pronunciation practices. Particular attention was paid to students' pronunciation errors, their willingness to speak, their interaction with peers and their confidence when communicating orally. Selected participants were interviewed using a semi-structured format to explore their perceptions of English pronunciation, the challenges they encountered, and their views on the instructional strategies implemented during the intervention. Open-ended questions gave students an opportunity to describe their learning experiences in their own words.

Focus Groups Discussions

As a researcher I conducted focus group discussions with Grade 8, 9, and 10 students to facilitate collaborative reflection on their experiences in learning pronunciation. Group discussions on shared challenges of learners, classroom experiences and perceived improvements post the intervention yielded rich qualitative data.

Document Examination

For further demonstrate learners' language development, students' written work, pronunciation exercises, classroom activities and vocabulary tasks were gathered and analyzed. These documents were a complement to the observational and interview data providing a view of patterns of language use and classroom engagement. The researcher kept a reflective journal throughout the study that included classroom observations, instructional decisions, student responses to intervention activities, and personal reflections on teaching practice. The journal was an important source of data for understanding classroom processes within the action research cycle.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The data obtained from interviews, classroom observations, focus group discussions, reflective journals and student documents were first transcribed and organized. The researcher read the data several times to familiarize himself with the participants' experiences.

The analysis was performed in several stages:

1. Repeated reading for familiarization of the data.
2. First coding of meaningful units of information.
3. Grouping related codes together into broader categories.
4. Development of overarching themes representing the participants' experiences; and
5. Interpretation of themes in relation to research question, theoretical framework and previous literature.

Rather than merely describing participants' responses, thematic analysis allowed the researcher to interpret participants' experiences of pronunciation challenges and the impact of collaborative multimodal instructional strategies on students' learning.

Credibility of the Study

In order to increase the quality and credibility of the research, I used several strategies in line with qualitative research standards. The credibility was enhanced

through prolonged engagement in the classroom, triangulation of multiple sources of data, member checking during the interview and continuous observation during the intervention period. The research context, participants, instructional strategies and classroom environment are described in great detail to allow readers to ascertain the applicability of the findings to similar settings of education. Systematic records of classroom observations, interview protocols, coding procedures and reflective journals were kept throughout the research process, enhancing the dependability of the study.

Conformability

As a researcher I kept reflexive notes to record assumptions, instructional choices, and interpretations during the study. The impact of researcher bias was further diminished by triangulating more than one source.

Ethical Questions

Ethical principles were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Formal permission was obtained from the school administration for the research to be carried out, and the data collection process was started. The students were informed of the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation and the right to withdraw at any stage without consequences for their academic record. All interview quotations and classroom observations are presented using pseudonyms to protect participants' privacy. All data collected during the research were kept confidential and solely used for academic purposes. The intervention activities were part of normal classroom instruction and did not pose any physical, psychological or academic risk to participants. The methodological procedures used in this study are discussed in this chapter. In this study, a qualitative action research design was used to investigate and improve the English pronunciation of Doteli-speaking students by employing collaborative multimodal instructional strategies. This chapter discussed the research setting, participants, action research cycle, data collection procedures, thematic analysis methods, trustworthiness strategies, and ethical considerations. In this chapter, the findings of the study are presented, organized according to the main themes that emerged from the thematic analysis.

Results

This chapter presents the findings from a qualitative action research study on the impact of collaborative multimodal instructional strategies on the English pronunciation of Doteli speaking students in a community school in Doti District, Nepal. The data were produced through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group

discussions, students' written work and the researcher's reflective journal. Three major themes emerged from the data following thematic analysis. In this section, I have introduced to the first two themes that are related to students' pronunciation difficulties and the contextual barriers that influence their pronunciation development. The third theme, which is about the intervention and its outcomes, is discussed in the next section.

Theme 1: Difficulties in Pronunciation Encountered by Doteli Speaking Students

The first theme revealed that students had a lot of difficulty with correct pronunciation of English words. These pronunciation difficulties were not only related to the production of individual sounds, but also influenced learners' confidence, oral participation and willingness to communicate in English. The analysis revealed that pronunciation problems were influenced by a number of interrelated factors such as mother tongue interference, unfamiliar English phonemes, limited vocabulary and fear of making mistakes in classroom interaction.

Interference of the Mother Tongue

A majority of the participants stated that they usually pronounced the English words based on the sound system of their first language, Doteli. Similar sounds were substituted for sounds unfamiliar in Doteli, the native language, resulting in inaccurate pronunciation. In written form, students said that they could recognize many English words, but had difficulty pronouncing them correctly when reading aloud or speaking in class. "English is the hardest subject for me because I cannot pronounce many English words correctly. The sounds are different from our language and I become confused when I read aloud," said one of the students of Grade 9. Similarly, another participant said: "Sometimes I know the meaning of a word but I cannot pronounce it properly because English sounds are different from Doteli." These responses indicate that pronunciation difficulties were mostly phonological, not lexical. Students had some knowledge of vocabulary but found it hard to produce unfamiliar sound patterns in English. Classroom observations reinforced the findings of the interviews. In oral reading activities, students often substituted unfamiliar consonants with sounds that are common in Doteli. Final consonants were frequently dropped or changed, and some students hesitated before experimenting with unfamiliar words. The pronunciation patterns were consistently observed in Grades 8, 9 and 10, indicating that mother tongue interference was still a persistent problem regardless of grade level.

Limited Reading Fluency Limited Vocabulary

Participants stated that lack of vocabulary knowledge also led to difficulty with pronunciation. The students said that encountering unfamiliar words interrupted their reading fluency and reduced their confidence to participate in oral classroom activities. One Grade 10 student said, "When I see difficult English words I stop reading because I don't know how to pronounce them. "I make spelling mistakes and pronunciation mistakes together, because I don't know a lot of English words," another participant said. "These responses show a close association between vocabulary knowledge and pronunciation development. Students relied on memorization rather than on phonological understanding, which made it difficult to pronounce new words encountered in reading texts. Further analysis of the students' written work revealed many spelling mistakes that indicated uncertainty of pronunciation. In many cases words were written down according to their perceived pronunciation rather than according to conventional English spelling suggesting that learners relied on phonetic approximation rather than on orthographic knowledge.

Low Confidence to Speak

A common theme across the interviews and classroom observations was the learners' lack of confidence in speaking English. Many of the participants admitted that they were reluctant to read aloud because they were afraid of making pronunciation errors in front of their classmates. "I feel shy when the teacher asks me to read because I think my friends will laugh if I say a word wrong," said one participant. Another student explained: "Sometimes I know the answer, but I don't speak because I'm not sure of my pronunciation.

These statements were confirmed by classroom observations. Many students spoke softly during oral reading, paused frequently before words they did not know, or asked the teacher for help before continuing. Some students consciously looked away when they were asked to volunteer for oral activities.

The results showed that pronunciation problems were not only linguistic but also related to the learners' emotional reactions to speaking English. Students' willingness to communicate was highly influenced by their anxiety, hesitation and fear of negative judgment. In general, Theme One shows that Doteli speaking learners had problems in pronunciation because of many interrelated factors. Mother tongue interference influenced the production of unfamiliar English sounds, reading fluency was impeded by limited vocabulary and oral communication was impeded by pronunciation anxiety.

These difficulties, rather than isolated language errors, combined to limit the students' active engagement in English language learning.

Theme 2: Obstacles to Pronunciation Development in the Classroom

A second theme points to the contextual factors in the school setting which limited students' chances of developing English pronunciation. Participants repeatedly mentioned that their pronunciation learning was hampered by limited resources for instruction, lack of exposure to spoken English and teacher-centered classroom practices.

Few Opportunities to Hear Spoken English

Most of the participants said that English was used only in English lessons. Outside the classroom, communication was almost entirely in Doteli or Nepali. Thus, students had very little chance to hear the authentic English pronunciation or practice spoken English in meaningful situations.

"In English class, I just speak English," one Grade 8 student said. Everyone speaks Doteli at home.

Another said: "When school is finished, no one speaks English. We forget many words."

These responses indicate that classroom instruction was the main source of English input for students. Limited exposure on a regular basis restricted opportunities for repeated listening and practice to internalize English pronunciation patterns. Classroom observations also indicated that students rarely used English spontaneously in group activities unless the teacher specifically directed them to do so. Most of the conversations drifted into Doteli as the learners were more linguistically comfortable with their mother tongue.

Lack of Learning Materials

Limited instruction resources was another common obstacle to pronunciation development as identified commonly by students. Several participants reported that they did not have dictionaries, pronunciation guides, audio materials or extra English reading materials. One of the participants said, "Sometimes I cannot check how a word is pronounced because our school does not have a dictionary. "We have only one textbook," said another student. We have no other books for English reading practice. Observation notes confirmed that the school had limited resources for teaching pronunciation. Teachers mainly used the prescribed textbook and did not have audio-visual resources that are typically used in pronunciation teaching. Such contextual

constraints reduced chances for repeated pronunciation practice and independent learning outside regular classroom teaching.

Dependence on Support from Teachers

Participants consistently reported that their English teacher was the main source of their knowledge about pronunciation. Although they liked teacher guidance, many students were not comfortable practicing pronunciation on their own.

“Our English teacher is the only one who teaches us pronunciation. If he is absent, we cannot learn how to say difficult words,” said a Grade 9 student. Another participant explained: “I wait for my teacher to pronounce the word first before I try. These responses indicate that students were very dependent on teacher modelling and lacked confidence in monitoring their own pronunciation. Such reliance limited learner autonomy and opportunities for self-directed pronunciation practice.

Participation in Classroom

Pronunciation problems were seen to have a direct impact on participation in the classroom. Students who had difficulties with pronunciation participated less often in oral discussions and volunteered less frequently for reading activities. On the other hand, students with higher confidence in pronunciation tended to take more active participation in classroom interaction, to answer more questions, and to demonstrate more willingness to communicate in English. The results indicated that there was a close relationship between pronunciation competence and classroom participation. Improving one would be likely to help improve the other. Theme Two indicates that the linguistic features of learners were not the only factor leading to the development of pronunciation, but also the overall educational context. Limited exposure to spoken English, poor instructional resources and heavy reliance on teacher support limited opportunities for pronunciation practice. These contextual barriers increased the learners’ pronunciation difficulties and decreased their confidence to participate actively in English-language learning. The action research involved 8-10 year old doteli speaking children who had difficulty in pronouncing English words due to three related problems.

Native language restrictions limited classroom resources and motivation for learning English. More specifically, most of the students could not differentiate the Doteli and English sound system, spell the words correctly and participate in oral activities in the class. However, the students demonstrated a significant improvement in accuracy and confidence to participate in oral activities through their involvement in the collaborative creation of printed pronunciation charts, finishing vocabulary puzzles and viewing

phonetic symbols and pictures of vocabulary words. Focus group data, student interviews, and classroom observations suggested that structured interventions resulted in increased production of correct English word pronunciations and participation in oral activities.

Conclusion

As a researcher, I have worked with teachers and students to develop effective multimodal pedagogical approaches to help Doteli-speaking students overcome their pronunciation difficulties, even with limited resources. These findings suggest significant improvements in students' pronunciation accuracy, confidence in speaking and engagement in class when students are immersed in peer-to-peer interaction and collaborative learning contexts rather than traditional teacher-centered contexts. This research shows that high-quality pronunciation instruction can be provided even in under-resourced settings through creative use of available resources. Given the importance of these findings for rural English language teaching in Nepal and in similar contexts around the world, educators may want to consider student-centred approaches with peer support and multiple modes of engagement. Further research should explore the scaling of these evidence-based practices in community-based schools and the application to other linguistic groups who experience challenges with learning English as a foreign language.

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