Motivational Strategies Employed by Pre-Primary School English Teachers in Nepal

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Abstract

Motivation plays an important role in teaching learning activities. The motivational techniques make the classroom more interesting, effective, and successful as they help teachers teach the students effectively and students learn enthusiastically and interestingly. Considering the teaching learning activities using motivational techniques in the classroom, this paper explores the current practices of motivational strategies implemented by English teachers at the pre-primary level. A series of interviews with purposively selected pre-primary level English teachers and their class observations reveal various motivational strategies used in the teaching learning activities in the classrooms. The strategies the teachers used in their daily practices include greetings the students, playing with goods, using rhymes in the class, offering rewards, and calling lovely names to the students. The implication of the study is that the motivational strategies employed in the classroom activities are more effective, fruitful, and the students learn the teaching stuff in a joyful environment.

Keywords: Greetings, playing, rhymes, rewards, learning, joyful environment

Introduction

This paper explores some current practices relating to motivational strategies implemented by English teachers at the pre-primary level while teaching. Teaching is supposed to be a complex task. Simply speaking, teaching means the act of making

students know, earn and do what has been prescribed in the curriculum. It is an act of conveying knowledge to students. Through teaching, the teachers intend to bring positive changes in students' behaviour. The teacher in the classrooms wants to teach effectively but sometimes what happens is students do not want to learn in the way the teacher instructs in the prescribed lessons and they show unintended behaviours like making noise and disturbing the teaching learning activities. It means some students do not show interest in their studies. In this context, the teacher cannot teach them effectively as he/she plans. This kind of situation can be minimized by motivating the students inside the classrooms. A number of research works (e.g., Chen et al., 2022; Filgona et al., 2020; Johnson, 2017; Rahman et al., 2021; Singh & Singh, 2021) reveal that motivation plays a great and significant role in learning.

Motivation is generally assumed as an inner drive or desire that moves a person to a particular action and it is an action word that can influence every part of our daily lives. Motivation is "a star player in the cast of characters assigned to second language learning scenarios" (Brown, 2000, p. 168) around the globe. It can have a principal role to make the learners success or failure in learning the content as well as a particular language. It makes learning fun (Malone & Lepper, 2021). Kelly et al. (1946) claim that motivation is the central factor in the effective management of the process of learning and they also claim that some type of motivation must be present to learn everything effectively. Showing the importance of motivation in learning, Deci (1975) and Weiner (1992) claim that motivation, in general, is a key to learning.

Motivation in learning is a strong predictor of course outcomes and is influenced by both individual and situational features (Klein et al., 2006; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Individual interest refers to "an intrinsic desire and tendency to engage in particular ideas, content, and activities over time" and situational interest, in contrast, refers to "the attention and affective reactions elicited by the environment" (Plass et al., 2013, p. 1054).

Brown (2000) distinguishes two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is concerned with the factors such as physical condition, student's interest, demand, level, method of the teachers, etc. in the classroom. Intrinsically motivated behaviors are ones that "are involved with the human need for being competent and self-determining" and this motivation "is innate and motivates such things as play, exploration, and the development of cognitive structures" (Deci, 1975, p. 131). In contrast, extrinsic motivation is "fueled by the anticipation of a reward from outside and beyond the self, typical extrinsic rewards are money, prizes, grades, and even certain types of positive feedback, and behaviors initiated solely to avoid punishment are also extrinsically motivated" (Brown, 2000, p. 172). We

tried to explore what strategies the pre-primary English teachers use to motivate the students in learning.

The subject of motivation, especially in the field of second language acquisition/learning has garnered plenty of consideration (e.g., B. K., 2012; Bhattarai, 2006; Bhusal, 2020; Bush, 1957; Gyenwali, 2006; Harrold, 2015; Lokandri, 2014; McNamee, 2017; Miura, 2011; Seward, 2017; Vinogradova, 2016) but little attention has been paid to the study concentrating on the strategies used to motivate the pre-primary school children aged below six year. In this context, this study aimed at exploring the current practices of motivation strategies employed by English teachers at the pre-primary level.

Methods and Procedures

In this research, we adopted the phenomenological qualitative research design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Flick, 2022; Kumar, 2019; Maxwell, 2013; Tracy, 2020) in which the "qualitative researchers stress on the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry . . . .the value-laden nature of inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 8). In this present research, we assumed the same philosophical assumption as explained by Denzin and Lincoln above while exploring the motivational strategies used by the pre-primary school English teachers of selected schools.

To collect the information, we selected six pre-primary school English teachers from six schools in Kathmandu district applying a purposive sampling procedure. We selected three community and three institutional schools to observe whether they applied a variety of strategies of motivation in teaching learning activities. To maintain anonymity, we used the pseudonyms such as School A, B, C, D, E, and F to indicate the selected schools and Teacher A, B, C, D, E, and F to the teachers. All the teachers were female. The teachers seemed to be varied in terms of qualification and experience. Teacher B (B. Ed. with 12 years of experience), D (M. Ed. with 18 years of experience), and E (M. Ed. with 18 years of experience) were from community schools. Similarly, Teacher A (B. Ed. with 16 years of experience), C (B. Ed. with 11 years of experience), and F (B. Ed. with 10 years of experience) were from institutional schools.

Information was collected through interviews with selected teachers using the interview guidelines as a tool and through classroom observation (three classes of each teacher). During the data collection, an audio recorder and diaries were used to note down the information. In the whole research process, we followed ethical issues as informed by Creswell (2007), Ryen (2007), Ary et al. (2019), and Cohen

et al. (2018). After taking information from participants, we listened to the audio recordings many times. We transcribed the collected information and translated them into English. After reading the English-translated data many times, we coded and interpreted the information by categorizing it into different themes following 'thematic networks' (Attride-Stirling, 2001), a tool for analyzing qualitative information. To establish the credibility and trustworthiness of this research, we applied the strategies such as 'triangulation' (Denzin, 1978), 'member checking' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and 'thick description' (Denzin, 1989), and 'prolonged engagement' (Fetterman, 2009) in the field collaborating with the participants.

Results and Discussion

The information received from the research participants has been interpreted and discussed categorizing it into five themes: greeting the students, playing with goods, using rhymes in the class, offering rewards, and calling lovely names to the students with the supporting details as follows.

Greetings

Greetings simply means a polite sign of welcome or recognition. Most often, in all schools, the students greet their teachers when they meet and when teachers enter the classroom. As we found greetings was used by the selected teachers in the classrooms to motivate their students. During the interview time, Teacher B, A, and C commonly said that they are using greetings in the classroom "to motivate their students". Teacher C further expressed that "greetings motivates the students if they share their greetings each other in the classroom." She further added that their happiness is clearly seen while they greet each other by saying 'Good morning, Bimal',. . . etc.". Her opinion is that though the class becomes a bit noisier the greetings they share it functions as a catalyst to motivate the students.

Greetings was found to be used as one of the most important practices of motivation used by pre-primary English teachers. During an observation in a school, we found that Teacher B entered the classroom and greeted students by saying "Good morning my dear students" and students replied the greeting to the teacher. Then the teacher said to students, "Please, share your greetings to your friends". Students shared their greetings with each other happily. The same teacher further said to the students, "Good students always share greetings to their friends". Teacher A of another school greeted all the students differently as he greeted all the students individually. He greeted saying, "Good morning X, Y, Z [using students' names], How are you?" All the students seemed cheerful when they shared greetings to their teachers. Individual greetings with students used in the classroom also helps to have close relationships with teachers the activities, and makes a positive environment for learning when it functions forwarming up for learning.

The finding corroborates with the study conducted by B. K. (2012). He concluded that "many teachers greet to the class and warm up to motivate the students" before entering the particular topic. He argued that greeting is one of the techniques of motivation. It is also in line with Bhusal's (2020) study that greetings in the class is used for "warming up, encouraging to the study, remembering and calling by name, establishing a good relationship with the teachers and students". From the shreds of evidence, it can be concluded that greetings is one of the motivational strategies used for the teaching learning process.

Playing with Goods

The strategy 'playing with goods' used in the pre-primary school classrooms refers to the use of goods or playing materials so as to help the students' learning. Some of the pre-primary school teachers were found to use various types of goods and materials to make the children engaged in learning. During the observation, a teacher was found to use this technique in School C, which was sponsored by Australian Agency. We saw several playing goods, blocks, balls, and other various small objects in different shapes and sizes collected in the classroom. In the classroom, Teacher A was instructing, advising, and communicating with the children to engage with the playing goods. Providing the goods to the children the teacher asked them to build some buildings, vehicles, kitchen sets, etc. The teacher asked them to work with them in groups and individually. The children seemed to work eagerly, actively, and enthusiastically communicating freely with their friends.

Teacher D of another school also engages the school children as Teacher A does. Providing the English alphabets haphazardly, Teacher D asked to arrange these alphabets alphabetically A-Z. She also announced to award the children who manage the alphabets from A-Z first in the order. The children being motivated intrinsically and extrinsically (Brown, 2000) engaged in playing and learning rather than rote memory. The children working with this method were found to engage with their full autonomy and they seemed to involve in the process of learning in their own ways.

School C even was using this technique. Teacher C found this technique especially to motivate the students. She opined that using this technique is quite easy to motivate the children in that they get easily motivated. She further added that they always "show their interest in playing and they easily and immediately involve in such activities as soon as we suggest them." She found using this technique easy to "motivate students and to make teaching learning activities more effectively."

This finding is informed by the "play-way method" of learning that is a "complete package that enables overall development of the child by developing in terms of feeling, intellect, and skills parameters" (Kanal, 2018). This method focuses

on the subjective as well as emotional development of the children. In this method of learning, playing acts as the motivating force as the entire learning method turns around activity-based learning. This finding is also in agreement with Karki's (2018) findings which showed that "the teacher needs to use supplementary materials to promote motivation, which is one of the key factors influencing learning" (p. 251). Here, "supplementary materials" are equal to the use of supplementary goods as described in the present study.

Using Rhymes

Rhyme is a short poem or song that is sung for the children with the intention of teaching them a kind of lesson, knowledge, and information. Using rhymes is one of the most popular techniques used in teaching English at the pre-primary level. We found some teachers were using this technique during class observations. Relating to this, Teacher D used this technique to teach the alphabet a-z to the children. While teaching them she used the rhymes (phonic song) such as "A" for apple, "B" for ball, "C" for cat, etc. In a similar way, Teacher F was using the rhymes in order to teach the name of the seven days "Sunday-Saturday" of the week using Nepali. The rhymes sung in the classroom was "आईतबार बिहान घामसित उठेँ म, हातमुख धोएर पढ्न बसेँ म, सोमबार बिहान आमासित उठेँ म, हातमुख धोएर लेख्न बसेँ म . . ." The teacher used these rhymes to teach the equivalent English names of the days with the Nepali terms. We found the teachers engaging their students in learning by singing rhymes. The important point was that the students seemed to participate more spontaneously and enthusiastically while using the Nepali language in the class.

Teacher D was playing rhymes using her mobile phone "Baa Baa Black sheep have you any wool? Yes sir, Yes sir three baskets full; One for the master, one for the dame, and one for the little boy who lives down the lane" to refresh and arise the motivation in the classroom. With the reason for using the rhymes in the classrooms, Teacher F expressed, "Students get easily motivated by the rhymes, they learn comfortably with this practice giving more attention to it." She further said, "It is the best and easiest way to teach students because they give more attention to it and they show more interest in listening to the rhymes."

From the indications provided by the teachers and the information received from the class observations, it can be concluded that rhymes were found to be the most important and effective practice of motivation used by English teachers in the classroom. Students even seemed to be really motivated by rhymes in their learning. The result is consistent with the finding of B. K. (2012) who concluded that singing songs in the classrooms is very helpful to motivate bored and unmotivated students. Similarly, This finding broadly supports the work of Concannon-Gibney's (2021)

study that nursery rhymes are useful to "teach vocabulary and grammar to young children who are learning English" and Long and Mustafa's (2020) study which suggests that "teachers must be professionally-trained" for the purpose of motivating the children by using "nursery rhymes and songs in teaching vocabulary in early childhood classroom." The finding related students are more motivated in learning using their own language (here, Nepali) is also in line with the concept of Baker and Wright (2017), and Cummins (2006).

Offering Rewards

'Reward' simply means awarding and strengthening some important stimuli or objects that help the learners attain some targeted goal. It is an act of "reinforcing stimulus following a behavior that makes it more likely that behavior will occur again in the future" (Cherry, 2022). Pre-primary school English teachers have the practice of offering positive rewards for a desirable or pleasant stimulus after certain positive changes. They normally offer rewards in the forms of words, objects, and opportunities to motivate the children in learning.

With this regard, Teacher B offered a piece of chocolate to one student saying "Well done, you have done very well. Keep it up." when a child submitted an assignment to the teacher. She offered the reward in the form of words. In the same way, Teacher A presented a pencil to one of the students saying "Excellent! You are a very good student, keep it up." She further said, "If you do your class work properly and if you read the answer to the questions, I will give you a sharpener and a pencil." The teacher provided the reward in the form of objects and words. We found the students who were rewarded were very excited and energetic towards their tasks in the classroom. The reason for showing their intention and action towards work was to receive positive rewards from the teachers again. The children in the class appeared to be engaging in writing and reading in the class in order to receive positive rewards from the teacher.

Similarly, Teacher A gave pencils to those students who performed desirable actions and who read and memorized the answer to the targeted questions. She said, "It is the easiest way to motivate the students, they complete their homework and class work with the intention of getting reward from the teachers." The teacher of School C reported that the school organizes a program "Democratic Tuesday" in which students are given freedom fully to participate in various extra-curricular activities like singing, dancing, games, and other activities. Students openly and freely participate in different activities of their wishes and interests. She also shared that unless the students complete the assignment, they are not allowed to take part in the program "Democratic Tuesday". She added almost all the students normally

complete all the tasks assigned to them to participate in the program. The school strategically organizes the program to motivate the children in learning and they (the school teachers) "become successful" in our goal as she said. In this sense, they offer rewards in the form of opportunity.

The finding concerning offering rewards is informed by the information given by Dörnyei (2001) who stated that the basic motivational conditions can be created when there is "appropriate teacher behavior" in the school, "a pleasant and supportive atmosphere" in the classroom" and "a cohesive learner group with appropriate group norms". The teachers and the schools in the present study tried to create the appropriate environment to motivate the children for learning. The result of this study is also in line with Bhattarai's (2006) study that rewarding the students is essential to motivate in learning.

Calling Students with Lovely Names

Calling the students with lovely names is a kind of activity in which students are given lovely names with full love and care by the teachers. In this activity, the teachers call the students with lovely names and full of love whenever students perform the desirable activities. It is a verbal expression of affection with lovely names for the students. Calling the students by lovely names is also one of the impressive practices of motivation used by the English teachers in the pre-primary level. We found the teachers giving lovely names to the students to motivate them toward their tasks. This kind of activity was observed in Teacher B's class. She said to the student who had submitted her class work to the teacher, "Very good my 'motu'! You have done really well, keep it up."

It was also used by Teacher F in her class. When a student submitted homework to her she said to the little boy, "Well done, 'Gyanu'! You did well, I know you are a good student, keep it up." Similarly, Teacher E said to a little girl when the girl answered correctly asked by the teacher "Wow! It is absolutely good, 'little princess" I like it very much, keep it up." The students who received the lovely names from the teacher were extremely happy and motivated. The students were trying to get the lovely names from the teachers by doing their class work properly, submitting their class work appropriately, and copying the text from the book beautifully. The expressions made by the teachers such as 'motu', 'Gyanu', and 'little princess' are lovely names for the students. We found students were greatly motivated towards their task by calling with lovely names.

The finding of the present study (i.e., calling the students with lovely names to motivate the children to learning) is informed by the studies such as Maslow (1970), Dörnyei (2001), and McLeod (2022). They mentioned that love, affection, and belongingness are essential to motivate to learn the language and content.

Conclusion

This paper explored some motivational strategies employed by English teachers at the pre-primary level. The major strategies they used in their daily practices were greetings to the students, playing with goods, using rhymes in the class, offering rewards, and calling lovely names to the students. Motivation is one of the important factors for successful teaching and learning. It helps to strengthen, direct, and stand constructive behavior over a long period of time. It also helps to develop the students' creativity and curiosity to learn the language and content. If the learners are motivated they will actively engage in the teaching learning activities. In such an encouraging learning environment, the teachers will feel comfortable for teaching, and the students will feel stress-free to learn. Such practices of motivation are better to be implemented in the classroom to meet the expected goals and objectives set in the curriculum.

Implementation of the motivational practices depends on the facilities of the schools provided to the teachers and the students, and the teachers how much capable and knowledgeable they are to apply the motivational techniques in the classroom situations regardless of the type of school whether it is a community or institutional. The language or languages (i.e., students' home language or foreign language; English in our context) used in the classroom appear one of the important motivational factors for learning. The students naturally seem to be motivated and interested to take part in the interaction with the teachers and among the students in their home languages. The implication of the study is that the motivational strategies employed in classroom activities are more effective, and fruitful. Most importantly, the students learn the teaching stuff in a joyful environment.

It is does not seem to be easy to confirm whether an intrinsic, extrinsic or any other type of motivation is useful for learning. Considering the available context (i.e., existing facilities of the particular school, level and interest of the students, knowledge, interest, and capacity of the teacher to use motivation) into consideration, the teacher can use the appropriate amount and type of motivation to stimulate the students for learning. With regard to the strategic and appropriate use of motivation in various levels of school education, more qualitative and quantitative research concerning the levels of the students situating in various contexts (i.e., geographical, socio-economic/political, and so on) are essential to carry out focusing on macro, meso, and micro policy and practice level.

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