

The Role of E-learning in Studying English Language: Teachers' and Students' Perspectives

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Abstract

The substantial increase in technological innovation over the past few decades has had a significant impact in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Governments throughout the world are investing a lot of resources to keep up with this technological innovation as a result. Considering this, many local levels of Nepal recently committed to implement e-learning to teach English and other subjects in schools and colleges. Keeping this in mind, the present descriptive phenomenological study tries to explore English Language (EL) teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the role of E-learning in studying English. A total of 24 participants including eight EL teachers and 16 students studying English Education at master's level participated in the study. I employed convenience technique to collect the study area and purposive sampling technique to select the sample. Similarly, I employed the Single Focused Group Disunion (SFGD) technique to collect the data. As per the choice of the participants, the discussions were conducted in the Nepali language in face-to-face mode. FGDs were audio recorded, transcribed and thematized. The findings of the study were presented and discussed in terms of themes using descriptive methods for analyzing qualitative data. The findings are presented and explored in four themes. They are promoting fundamental learning skills, independence, adaptability, and interaction.

Key words: E-learning, English Language, students' and teachers' perspectives, qualitative analysis

Introduction

E-learning involves the use of electronic devices in the learning process. A growing body of literature has highlighted the significance of implementing e-learning in ELT. As mentioned by Yang & Chen (2007) and Allam & Elyas (2016) e-learning is very convenient for teaching and learning English. Many research studies support the potential advantages of implementing e-learning for both students and teachers. For instance, Smith (2000) has stated that e-learning provides the possibility to do away with the time and space constraints that are present in traditional learning situations. In a similar vein Debski & Gruba (1999), Yang & Chen (2007), Al-Qahtani, (2016) and Al-Hassan & Shukri, (2017) have viewed that e-learning helps students to learn English in real-world settings. Additionally, e-learning tools also enable students to communicate with English speakers directly and easily.

The incorporation of E-learning in teaching and learning English, according to Westbrook (2006), does not produce the desired results. Debski and Gruba (1999) also argued that the effective integration of E-learning for the teaching and learning of English is measurable. They further concluded that appropriate assessment techniques that reflect the views of both students and teachers toward technology use still need to be considered. Time management, according to Kebritchi et al. (2017), is another major problem in online learning. According to Bhusal and Rimal (2020) using e-learning is challenging for the students because many students in Nepal do not have reliable internet access. Tümen (2020) also writes students often get struggle in e-learning because of many factors such as time management, exam-related issues, traditional educational practices, a heavy workload and a lack of engagement and communication. Therefore, there is a compelling need to investigate the perspectives of both students and teachers regarding the adoption of E-learning for ELT purposes. The importance of this paper lies in the fact that many other studies have focused their attention on the effectiveness and limitations of e-learning in English (Toni Mohr, Holtbrügge, & Berg, 2012) but this study focuses on exploring college-level EL teacher' and students' perceptions about the role of e-learning in Nepalese context.

Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted to fulfill the following objective:

- To explore EL teachers' and students' perspectives about the role of e-learning in studying English.

Literature Review

Digital resources like computers, tablets, and even mobile phones regarded as best tools to learn English. Students can easily use these electronic devices at anytime and anywhere to study English. The use of computer-based technologies in learning English has a long history (Davies, 2012a, 212b). Computer-based technologies have been used in language education since the 1960s when educational researchers first demonstrated an interest in employing them in instruction after the emergence of commercial mainframe computers in the 1950s (Davies,

2012a). The employment of technology in the field of education has grown in popularity over time, particularly since the introduction of the World Wide Web.

The use of e-learning is regarded as revolutionary, potential, and crucial for EL learning (Hellebrandt, 1999). Students can use e-learning materials to develop their language skills (Yang & Chen, 2007; Shuchi, & Islam, 2016). The inability to offer students an authentic English learning environment due to the predominance of the Nepali language is one of the main drawbacks of traditional face-to-face instruction. Additionally, due to the enormous class sizes, there are few opportunities for individual students to participate or have one-on-one interactions with their teachers. Therefore, through interaction with other students in the virtual world, e-learning provides a platform for students to improve their communication (speaking) skills in English (Yang & Chen, 2007). Notably, these restrictions apply to many nations where English is used as a foreign language and are not unique to the Nepalese setting (Yang & Chen, 2007).

Considering this, Lee (2002) conducted pilot research to improve learners' communication abilities by utilizing synchronous computer chat and task-based instructions. According to the findings of that study, task-based learning, and e-learning engagement work together to develop students' communication abilities by fostering a lively atmosphere in which they may participate in real-time dialogues about subjects that interest them. Additionally, it was noted by Warschauer (1999) and Yang and Chen (2007) that the advantages of e-learning for enhancing speaking abilities include the chance for more equitable involvement than is supported in face-to-face engagement. Additionally, communication does not have to be limited to the local level and can be extended to an international context with remarkable ease, providing possibilities for students to improve their cross-cultural communication skills. For instance, teachers in Nepal can create discussion groups for their students on any subject and invite people from other countries to widen and improve the discussion without having to leave the country or physically mix in a sex-segregated setting. However, it is crucial to highlight that in Nepal, these discussion forums are viewed as more suitable for university students and less acceptable for use in a school setting (Madini & de Nooy, 2014).

Automatic voice recognition technology gives shy and other students who do not often get the opportunities to talk with native speakers to practice speaking to improve their communication abilities (Yang & Chen, 2007). As stated by numerous academics, including (Chiu, Liou, & Yeh, 2007), one benefit of e-learning is the use of automatic voice recognition systems that enable students to connect verbally with a computer. To allow students to interact with their computers, Candle Talk, a web-based chat environment, has also been created (Chiu et al., 2007). This software gives EFL students access to specific speech training programs, improving their oral communication abilities. Furthermore, the use of automatic voice recognition software, like that of college first-year students, can make it easier to teach oral communication. It is significant that most students have accepted teaching strategies based on speech recognition software. Another benefit of e-learning is that it can be used to design effective learning environments that will inspire students and produce worthwhile learning

activities and outcomes (Garrison, 2011; Yang & Chen, 2007). For instance, according to Garrison (2011), text-based E-learning communication produced via e-mail messages or discussion threads has distinctive and useful qualities that can encourage critical debate and reflection.

Al-Menei (2008) examined the value of such text-based tools and the efficacy of Saudi students' computer-assisted English writing abilities. His research showed that Saudi EFL students' writing skills significantly improved when they utilized computer-assisted programs to fix their grammar and paragraph writing, as the e-learning environment gives them plenty of time to reflect and concentrate. Farzi (2016) also noted that it is possible to teach computers to offer correction instructions to spot any writing errors. It may be argued that doing so encourages students to edit their work and improves their writing. Furthermore, due to the unlimited accessibility of course materials e-learning, e-learning offers students unparalleled opportunities to improve their reading skills (Brandl, 2002). E-learning information encourages access to knowledge at any time and from any location, enabling students to get around the limitations of textbook-based learning. E-learning resources offer a wealth of opportunities for listening to genuine language. Romeo (2008) noted the value of audio prompts made available through e-learning programs and listening exercises to comprehend relative sentences. He presents data suggesting that learners change their approach to learning and comprehension when more syntactically difficult phrases are utilized.

The e-learning interactions encourage students' interest and enthusiasm in language learning in addition to helping them improve their English language proficiency. However, if students and teachers do not use an E-learning system, its advantages cannot be fully realized. The author's approaches for investigating the many advantages of e-learning from the viewpoints of teachers and students are described in the next part, which also makes sure to pay attention to any potential drawbacks.

Materials and Methods

Approach and Methods of the study

I adopted qualitative approach since the objective of the study was to explore how students' and teachers' (groups') opinions regarding the role of e-learning in studying English. It is the best suited approach for exploring and examining groups' perspectives about specific phenomena (Creswell, 2009). Furthermore, participants' social reality can only be conceptualized using a qualitative method as an evolving phenomenon with emergent qualities (Bryman, 2004). Among the methodologies used in the qualitative approach, I employed phenomenological methodology based on Davidson (2000) and Jones (2007). A phenomenological investigation "is an attempt to deal with inner experiences un-probed in everyday life" (Merriam, 2002, p. 7). Furthermore, it is employed to identify phenomena, concentrate on experiences, and comprehend the organizational principles behind those actualized experiences. Additionally, it assists in determining the significance of human experience in relation to a phenomenon or noteworthy common occurrence (Creswell, 2009).

Research Site

The research was conducted at one of the constituent campuses located in Banke district under the Faculty of Education (FoE), Tribhuvan University (TU). The site of the research was chosen based on my accessibility and convenience

Participants of the Study

A total of 24 participants, including 16 students and eight teachers participated in the study. The student participants were master's level students who have been studying English education at one of the constituent campuses located in Banke district under the FoE, TU. Similarly, teacher participants were EL teachers who have been teaching English Education at master's level in the same faculty and campus. Among 16 students, four students (two boys and two girls) were selected from each of the four semesters. Out of eight teacher participants, seven were male and one was female. I intended to involve equal number of male and female teachers but there was only one female teacher teaching at the master's level in the campus which I have selected for the study. Therefore, the number of male and female teachers could not be equal. I employed purposive sampling to select the sample. Selected teachers and students were coded from T1 to T8 and from S1 to S16 respectively to make them anonymous. Furthermore, they were grouped into four groups (two groups of teachers and two groups of students) for conducting FGDs. The teachers' and students' groups were coded as TG1 and TG2 and SG1 and SG2, respectively. The participants were chosen and divided into groups based on their gender and prior knowledge and experience about e-learning.

Data Collection Techniques and Tools

I employed SFGD technique to elicit the required data since achieving depth rather than breadth was the objective of the study. It also allowed for collecting quick information cost-effective information, the new emergent concepts and raising of issues and concerns that the researcher might not have discovered from other instruments (Kumar, 1987; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The participants were divided into four groups and each of the groups was involved in FGDs at once. The informants were given as much time as they needed to voice their perspectives during FGDs. I used an audio recorder to audio record all the FGDs. The average time of FGD was one hour and 23 minutes.

Data Analysis

First, I prepared verbatim transcriptions of audio recorded FGDs manually based on Turners (1931). Then, I listened to and re-listened to each of the audio recorded FGDs while reading the transcriptions to make sure the information was accurate. The print verbatim transcriptions of the FGDs were then submitted to the participants for member verification. Additionally, they were tasked to confirm and examine the accuracy of the transcriptions. The participants were also instructed to specify which portions of the transcripts they wanted to be left out of the data. It was done to strengthen the validity and reliability of my study (Doyle, 2007). Then, the final transcription was prepared and analyzed thematically based on Miles and Huberman's (1994)

approach to thematic analysis. The procedures included becoming familiar with the data, creating preliminary codes, looking for themes, reviewing and labeling themes, and performing the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data generated by the group was treated rather than emphasizing individual contributions (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The groups were therefore the units of analysis and were handled in the same manner as discrete units of individual data

Ethical Consideration

To perform the research ethically, I tried to adhere to all the ethical guidelines. I made every effort during the process to prevent bias and any form of preconceived assumptions. Participants were asked to give their consent in advance before conducting FGDs. In addition, data were anonymized to preserve respondents' identities and deal with any ethical issues that arose during the research in the tightest of confidence. I showed proper respect to the informants and other important individuals who were involved directly or indirectly in my research. All the participants were given the option of participating or not and they were also informed that they might leave the study at any moment and without prior notice. The study's goals, methods, potential risks, rewards, and uncertainties were all disclosed to the participants, along with other pertinent information. I was always conscious of the need for originality, secrecy, fairness, and legal considerations. To ease their concern and ensure secrecy, the participants were informed that their real names would not be included in the research paper.

Findings and Discussions

The findings of the research are presented in themes. Overall, four themes have been identified based on the information from the FGDs. Each of the themes is presented and discussed separately in the following section.

Key to Promote Listening and Speaking Skills

Despite the numerous advantages that E-learning in teaching and learning EL offers, the participants of the study concentrated on the improvement of listening and speaking skills only. In traditional face-to-face ELT in Nepal, these skills are believed to be passive and less required. But the participants of this study perceived e-learning as a platform for helping students improve their speaking and listening skills in practical settings. For instance, one of the participants of SG1 group has claimed:

Listening is one of the most crucial skills of English. You know, e-learning offers audio and video for students to view and listen to as much as they can, which will help them with poor listening skills, and something like this e-learning should be used.

This quotation serves as an important example of how language learning works, specifically how E-learning can help students improve their listening abilities. They believe the existing system is not student-centered, the respondents also held the view that e-learning could be helpful in helping them develop their listening skills more fully. The given textbooks do not attempt to develop all areas of students' talents, resulting in deficits in certain areas. In Nepal, resources are insufficient, video-based activities are frequently inappropriate, and little effort

is made to teach using a learner-centered paradigm. This emphasizes the potential for the usefulness of e-learning education in a setting like Nepal. The following statement made by the SG1 group is also interesting:

There are a lot of advantages that come to mind. For instance, if implemented properly, e-learning can preserve open communication that can be extended not only inside the school community but also throughout the entire world. Speaking English is one of the key talents and using English-language chat rooms while using e-learning can help with speaking abilities. Since we live in a non-English speaking nation, we can see how e-learning education will aid in the improvement of student's speaking abilities.

This group also concentrated on emphasizing speaking as a specific ability that is considered helpful in e-learning learning. They believed that students would benefit from using chat rooms to hone their speaking abilities since they offer opportunities that are not currently available in the typical teaching and learning context. They advised against relying solely on chat rooms for e-learning, however, as this could lead to a sense of social isolation among students and teachers. The findings of this study support the findings of Warschauer's (1996) research on communication, which claims that "the benefits of communication are seen as many: feeling part of a community, developing thoughts and ideas, learning about different people and cultures, and students' learning from each other (p. 39)." The respondents to this study regarded improvement in their speaking abilities as a key affordance. On the other hand, few participants felt that some aspects of English learning might be hampered by e-learning. TG2 group, for instance, emphasized that it should not interfere with the other skills that children develop through face-to-face instruction and learning, such as handwriting abilities. The need for moderation in interpreting this group's judgments of the value of e-learning therefore became apparent. In other words, participants acknowledged the value of e-learning but warned against potential drawbacks such as students' handwriting not developing properly.

Overall, the analyses revealed that E-learning supports the development of students' speaking and listening abilities, which is significant for the students who solely receive traditional face-to-face English education lack competency in these areas. This is since, as was already noted, due to the predominance of Nepali language in public life, Nepal does not provide students with the opportunity to be exposed to a natural English learning environment.

It is interesting that the groups did not really discuss the additional advantages of e-learning for improving reading and writing skills. This might be the case since conventional approaches to teaching and learning already cover these topics in detail. However, evidence from other sources claims that e-learning can support the mastering of English reading and writing (Al-Menei, 2008; Brandl, 2002). It was also evident from the teachers' and students' responses that they spoke broadly about technology use and e-learning but did not go into detail about how these topics relate to the advancement of EL learning. This indicates that rather than emphasizing how technology helps students learn English, both teachers and students focused on the technology itself. This could be because e-learning is a recent development in Nepal,

particularly at the college level, and the research participants may not have been aware of or knowledgeable about its benefits.

This study's findings are consistent with those made public by Yang and Chen (2007), who discovered that most students who study technology enhanced language learning seem to place more value on the technology than on language learning. As a result, this research's findings indicate that teacher preparation programs in this area are necessary.

Encourage Independence

The ability of e-learning to promote autonomous learning was highlighted during the discussions as a major benefit. T5 (one of the participants of TG2 group) for example stated:

I believe that if implemented properly, this will lessen the amount of work I have to do in the classroom, and e-learning encourages students to rely on themselves and have various English learning styles.

The teacher's quote from above emphasizes the prospect that using E-learning can offer many learning methods. According to Kinsella (1995), styles are an individual's natural, ingrained, and preferred method of taking in, processing, and remembering new knowledge and skills (p. 171). Christison (2003) also recognizes the many ways learning styles can be described, such as cognitive style, sensory style, and personality style. However, when understood in relation to the needs of this research, the identification of learning styles is particularly helpful because, as stated in Oxford's work from 2002, "when allowed to learn in their favorite way, unpressured by learning environment or other factors, students often use strategies that directly reflect their preferred learning" (p. 127). Another helpful version was made in this regard by S7 (one of the participants of SG1):

The vast amount of knowledge that is readily available on electronic learning is the only thing that motivates me to use it. It contains information that is simple to reach.

This claim implies that a lot of material may be made easily accessible to students through e-learning to promote learning regardless of context. Students do not always need a teacher's presence or to be in the classroom to receive pertinent information. The respondents said that this aspect of technology was very user-friendly. Another student i.e., S9 (SG2 group), however, who has never used e-learning learning, stated the following:

Since I have no prior experience with e-learning, I do not think I will find it to be particularly simple to utilize.

This student expressed concern that using e-learning would be challenging for someone with no prior expertise and no instruction. This emphasizes the significance of the teacher's support of students using e-learning resources. The TG2 group also saw that by offering feedback, e-learning encourages independent learning. For illustration, they mentioned:

When you do not require a teacher to determine whether your response is correct or not, immediate feedback provided by e-learning can be useful. This gives us great encouragement.

This shows that students find it compelling to learn independently using technology for e-learning instruction without their teachers' interference or observation. As previously said, a crucial component of this is the ability to use E-learning to receive immediate feedback. Indeed, educators, including those who teach foreign languages, have long recognized the value of computers' ability to deliver fast and individualized feedback for the learning process (Salaberry, 2001; Alrabai, 2017). Additionally, research results by Ghanizadeh, Razavi, and Jahedizadeh (2015) show that contemporary technologies enhance input quality, communication authenticity, and feedback relevance. The aforementioned information supports the SG2. group's position.

Encourage Adaptive Learning

Majority of the participants claimed that flexibility offered by e-learning can help people learn English. S12 of the TG2 group, for instance, stated:

I believe that e-learning will help to improve their English since] students have access to the coursework 24 hours a day, giving them more flexibility on time to follow up on what they missed in class.

According to this claim, students who are motivated and able to practice more would take advantage of the opportunities provided by e-learning resources and so significantly enhance their English. Therefore, rather than simply highlighting the accessibility of the resources e-learning, emphasis should be made on the flexibility offered by the chance to practice whenever it suits you. Beyond students, teachers are also subject to the notion of flexibility. This indicates that with the use of electronic learning, both students and teachers can carry out their responsibilities from any location. Other groups also had also similar point of view. For instance, S7 (one of the participants of SG1) stated:

I can utilize e-learning whenever, which implies I have flexibility to use E-learning to complete additional exercises or to complete assignments.

The SG2 group also shared their perspectives on how adaptable they find e-learning education to be for their requirements in both teaching and learning. One of the participants i.e., S13 in this context mentioned that:

You already know that most students spend time e-learning. In a typical classroom, I would only have a certain amount of time to learn; but, with the usage of e-learning, I would have unlimited access to the classes and could study whenever I wanted. We now have no flexibility in our English study because we are limited to learning exclusively in a classroom setting. I believe that with the support of e-learning, we can help students learn English and share knowledge beyond physical and geographic boundaries.

In comparison to earlier remarks given by participants, the comment emphasizes how e-learning helps students overcome physical and geographic constraints. This illustrates how effortlessly students from different geographical locations can converse while using e-learning resources for education. Due to this functionality, students may be inspired to interact with people from all over the world and use the interactive features of e-learning learning.

Additionally, through their interactions with the outside world and when they read for leisure, this aspect might extend students' perspectives in terms of both social and cultural understanding. Internet technology has a global reach and can offer a wealth of international resources, claim Yang and Chen (2007). Like this, e-learning education gives English language learners access to helpful resources and direct contact with English speakers. Students can practice applying knowledge in the first scenario, while they can go over the decontextualized character of English language learning in the second scenario. Through e-learning learning, students can also acquire integrated skills in speaking, reading, and writing English. Finally, e-learning gives students the chance to extend their global perspectives and develop an appreciation for many cultures.

Promoting Interactive Learning

Participants said that interactive technology like e-learning makes it possible for students to communicate with their lecturers or one another very effectively. For instance, a teacher stated how e-learning can give teachers and students a way to communicate outside of the classroom, enhancing English learning and teaching on a regular basis. T6, regarding this issue (one of the participants of TG2) stated that:

E-learning environments are different from traditional learning settings because they can include a full suite of technology tools that enable professors and students to connect in a novel manner outside of the classroom over the internet.

According to the statement above, adopting e-learning to learn and teach English can foster relationships between teachers and students as well as between students and other students. This might be crucial in supporting students' English-language learning. Other teachers in the same group then agreed, viewing E-learning as an interactive teaching tool as well. The following summarizes the TG2 group's opinions about this issue:

Considering that we all attend schools in the same area and that our educational system now discourages engagement with students from other regions, we believe that e-learning will enable me to converse with students from across the world while also improving my language skills.

The implication is that because e-learning is interactive, students from many nations can benefit from one another's knowledge. This was also noted by Shumin (2002), who claimed that "the necessity for exposure to numerous sorts of scenarios, situations, and accents as well as voices is particularly crucial" because "native speakers of the target language are rarely available in foreign language contexts" (p. 209). The perspective presented here shares many characteristics

with the findings of the study by Yang and Chen (2007), which were covered above in the section under "The importance of E-learning in encouraging flexible learning." Students seem to see learning the English language from a more global perspective. In fact, few students of SG2 mentioned:

we will then use e-learning because it will add something fresh to studying English more open engagement with teachers and fellow students, that is interaction that occurs outside of the classroom.

The SG1 group had a similar point of view.

one of the most significant benefits of E-learning is the e-learning interaction component that it will bring to students and teachers, such as marking, sending, and getting the homework. E-learning will increase the likelihood of communication between students and teachers. This communication may take the form of email, message boards, or chat rooms. Therefore, when learning English outside of the classroom, the students will have more time to participate and interact.

These two remarks indicated that while they believed that teacher-student interaction was crucial for learning English, they also recognized that e-learning promoted this interaction more effectively outside of the traditional classroom setting. For example, it appears crucial to encourage students' and teachers' proactive involvement in English learning and teaching in an e-learning environment through a variety of kinds of interaction, such as e-learning collaboration and the provision of real-time feedback. This position, which is supported by existing research and emphasizes the need of a collaborative approach to E-learning, is that successful collaboration between professors and students is essential to an effective teaching and learning process, both e-learning and offline. Increased interaction between students and/or between students and teachers helps to facilitate this. Findings from Chen's (2014) study showing "the nature of interactivity and immediate feedback of a WBEL setting has a beneficial influence on the stimulation of students' interest and competency in English learning" lend credence to this claim (p. 160). This study's findings show how negotiations between students and professors result in the construction of knowledge. Additionally, it highlights the idea that education is a social communication process.

Conclusions and Implications

The study sought to explore teachers and student's perspectives regarding the role of e-learning in EL learning. The findings of the study revealed that the participants perceived e-learning more advantageous for improving listening and speaking skills. Moreover, both students and teachers made the argument that using e-learning to study EL in Nepal offers opportunity for students to build speaking and listening abilities which may be lacking in the country's present curricula. The use of chat rooms in e-learning also makes it easier, more flexible, and more participatory for students to interact with people from all over the world. These crucial characteristics such as flexibility and interactivity of employing e-learning for learning EL may lead to successful language learning. Additionally, emphasis was placed on

how e-learning education encourages students to learn independently with less interference from their teachers. Furthermore, it appears that both students and teachers were more concerned with the features of e-learning than with how it enhances their use of English and how it may be incorporated into Nepali curriculum to improve results. Comparing the opinions of students and teachers in the current study also revealed that the former was more knowledgeable about such technologies than the latter. This shows that there is an obvious need to provide instructors with training on how to integrate such technology into the curriculum. As a result, the study recommends that EL teachers pursue the key set of pedagogical and technological abilities to effectively teach English using e-learning. The findings highlight the significance of designing realistic e-learning programs to satisfy EL teachers' and students' demands and advance EL instruction in Nepal. Such a method is essential for making students competent in using all language skills and aspects. In conclusion, due to the small sample size, the findings of the study are less generalizable to a broad population. Therefore, there is the to conduct the most comprehensive research to make the findings most valid, reliable, and generalizable.

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