

Challenges to Implement Technology Assisted English Language Teaching in Nepal: An Explorative Study



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Abstract

This paper investigates the various dimensions of the challenges to the technology assisted English language teaching faced by the secondary level English teachers of public schools from Kathmandu. The emergence and use of ICT and other innovative technologies in the teaching learning process demands restructuring in the English classrooms. Even though there exist a number of challenges and obstacles to adopt technology assisted teaching of English language skills, the study is focused towards prioritizing those challenges and suggesting some possible solutions to tackle them. The study is based on the qualitative research design and includes the in-depth interview with five purposively selected English teachers from the different schools. The study also includes the classroom observation for data collection. The data obtained were recorded and analyzed thematically based on the participant's perception and experiences. The findings indicate that the poor economic status, insufficient physical resources, lack of digital competency among teachers to adopt technology and the conventional curriculum design remain as the major challenges. The article recommends some policy intervention for improving the socio-economic condition of the families sending their children to the public schools so that they can afford to access the necessary devices, ICT tools and platforms. Allocation of sufficient budget as an investment in the technology friendly classrooms, periodic training to the teachers for enhancing teaching skills and timely amendment in the curriculum are the few suggestive measures to combat the challenges.

Keywords: Physical resources, ICT tools, digital competency, policy intervention

Introduction

Technology assisted teaching and learning encompasses a broad set of tools and materials including the radio, television, computers and the internet. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is much used terminology in every sector in this era. ICT in teaching refers to the combination of web tools, mobile phones, laptop and desktop computers, multi-media projectors, Internet, smart boards, and other related tools and platforms used in the field of language teaching. Both students and teachers can use these tools for pedagogical purposes. ICT tools provide many opportunities to both teachers and students to teach and learn English language skills, functions, aspects, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. They can improve their listening, speaking, reading and even the writing skills with the help of technology assisted teaching and learning. Video tutorials, mobile applications, movies, and animated resources are regarded as the effective means of learning English language with less time and effort. Rana and Rana (2020) and Sharma (2022) highlighted that the use of ICT in the classroom makes learning long lasting, interactive, interesting and convenient. It helps teachers to adopt modern pedagogy updating teacher's knowledge that makes teaching learning process fruitful.

By nature, students will be inquisitive, they are always eager to know new things in their classrooms too. They do not like teachers to teach them conventionally which makes them feel monotonous and boring (Mokhtar, 2016). This leads to increment in absenteeism in the class. Use of technology, particularly ICT is increasing day by day. Almost all the sectors contributing to world economy employ ICT tools for increasing efficiency in their performance. Even the teachers from government schools near to their retirement are adopting technology in the classes. However, some of them consider it just as to exhibit their formality whereas many of them are taking it seriously to conduct their classroom deliveries. According to Neupane (2023) English teachers in public schools are also adopting ICT tools in their language learning classrooms.

Being an international language the scope of English is increasing day by day.. Most of the public schools in Nepal also started English as their medium of teaching other subjects too (Saud, 2020). In this context, the government's policy of integrating ICT with teaching learning process is also visible. Many learning videos, tutorials and materials are being developed by the Curriculum Development Center (CDC). Based on the experiences shared by the students to the researcher, they did not find those videos fruitful enough to carry out the essence of the lessons. Government expenditure is also

gradually increasing to facilitate using technology in the learning process. However, studies show that using ICT tools in the English language classroom is not fruitful as expected (Neupane, 2022). Hashemi and Kew (2021) finds lack of teachers' confidence in using technology, lack of effective training, and lack of time as the three main obstacles towards the use of ICT in English language teaching. The findings of the study by Hashemi and Kew (2021) suggest that the administrations should provide effective training courses along with sufficient time allocation in allowing teachers to confidently employ ICTs in teaching the English language. Malagón and Pérez(2016)aims at establishing the reasons for the failure to normalize the use of computers in the English language classroom analyzing in depth the data proceeding from the interviews carried out among sixteen teachers of English from public and private Secondary Schools. The paper by Tafazoliand Golshan (2014) provides an over view of the broad information regarding Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). The focus of the review is on history, typology, phases, merits and barriers of this innovation in language teaching and learning. The findings of the study by Foltyn and Polok (2021)show that teachers were craving for collaboration and guidance. Other contributing and significant factors, which could have prompted more barriers-like responses, are the lack of guidelines from the Ministry of Education, weak support of the local stakeholders in recognizing one's effort, and mediocre provision of training sessions with longitudinal backing. Hani (2014) reveals that the most significant barriers of computer assisted language learning and teaching in the Arab World were inadequate number of computers, technical problems, lack of teacher training, lack of time and higher cost. The results also showed that the most essential benefits were providing immediate feedback, motivating students' learning, exciting and more fun, initiating more interaction and easy to control. However, the study on identifying the barriers to English Language Teaching with the help of technological tools is yet to perform in the context of public schools of Nepal.

Zadtyi et al. (2021) applied a qualitative descriptive research design conducted through questionnaires, observation, and interviews. Participants were EFL teachers from senior-high-schools. As per the study findings, the main barriers faced by teachers were lack of facilities, time, training, and internet problem. The research has the purpose of exploring teachers' capability and the barriers they face to improve the quality of ICT use in teaching English in the future. The study by Liang (2021) provides insights into the reasons why teacher-centered use of technology prevails. It also reveals teachers to hold critical opinions on technology integration and discusses the

implications for the promotion of teaching innovation and effectiveness. Further, the study deepens the understanding of the challenges for teachers and provides practical suggestions for facilitating their technology use. The research work by Singhavi and Basargekar (2019) reveals that lack of willingness of the teachers to use ICT in the classroom is one of the major hurdles in its implementation at the ground level. Ghavifekr et al. (2016) identified the key issues and challenges for teaching and learning with ICT tools as limited accessibility and network connection, limited technical support, lack of effective training, limited time and lack of teachers' competency. Khodabandelou et al. (2016) conducted the qualitative research to determine the hindrances faced by the education community in Malaysia which involves seven individuals who discussed issues relating to the hindrances of technology integration in English language teaching and learning. Mohammed et al. (2019) concludes that availability, accessibility and user-ability of ICT resources significantly affect students learning in senior secondary schools in Sokoto south, Nigeria. Teachers still have little regard for the potential of interactive and collaborative technology, according to Petrucco and Grion (2015), who prefer to use technology for searching information and materials rather than for discussion and participation in online communities with their peers in order to improve their teaching and move towards collaborative knowledge construction and sharing. Adhikari (2021) pointed out that insufficient ICT infrastructures, poor bandwidth of internet and limited skill of ICT among teachers and students have become the obstacles to incorporate technology in the Nepali education system.

Thus, the most relevant literature reveals the lack of study to explore the challenges to technology assisted English classes in the public schools of Kathmandu valley, Nepal. There might be some major issues after not attaining the satisfactory use of technology by the teachers in their language classes. Therefore, this research article investigates the challenges that teachers in the public schools of Kathmandu, Nepal, think they are facing to the technology assisted English language teaching, based on their knowledge, understanding and experiences. The paper also presents some suggestions of the respondents to overcome the identified challenges.

Methodology

As an English teacher at one of the public schools of Nepal, my research interest lies in language teaching to students. My overall purpose of this research is to find the challenges to implement technology in English language classroom. The fieldwork for

my research began after schools started to conduct blended mode of teaching during the outbreak of Covid-19. Gradually schools resumed their physical classes and teachers started to express their experiences of online classes among their colleagues. The unprecedented closure of schools, adoption of technology for virtual classes and difficulties that I myself felt while conducting classes at that time, were the factors that motivated me towards this study. I adopted the interpretive phenomenological research paradigm under which semi-structured interviews and classroom observation were used as the technique for data collection.

Interviews

Two female and three male English teachers from three different government schools of Kathmandu valley were purposively selected based on their teaching experiences, use of ICT while teaching in one or other way and their consent to participate in the study. All of them were involved in teaching English for grades nine and ten for last five years. Permission for the study was obtained from the school administration as well and a very good rapport was made with the participants of the study. The interview was carried out at a time and place convenient for the participant teachers on their corresponding school premises. It was continued until the saturation point was reached regarding the responses of the participants. Any duplication in the shared experiences on the raised questions by the participants was considered as the point of saturation. For ease and comfort these semi-structured interviews were held in Nepali language and later translated them into English.

Classroom Observation

Besides semi-structured interviews, I also carried out classroom observation of English classes in grade nine and ten at each of the three schools. There were six classroom observations in total. The same teachers interviewed previously were involved in teaching English at those classes. This helped to compare, contrast and analyze the perception of teachers what they stated in the interviews with their daily classroom experiences. These observations were carried out for gaining the in-depth information on the use of ICT while teaching English. Before observing the classes, consent from the corresponding school authorities were obtained. The classroom activities were recorded in the form of video and some snapshots. The recorded interviews, videos and snapshots were transcribed immediately after the session. The transcribed data were organized into specific themes and interpreted using interpretive

phenomenological analysis. Confidentiality of information was ensured by removing personal identifiers of the participants.

Results

The participants of the study reported a variety of challenges to the technology assisted English language learning. This section deals about the responses obtained from the participants that were presented in different categories.

Economic Status

According to Shakya et al. (2017) E-learning has made it simple for those who were unable to attend the higher academic institutions due to several reasons with the help of web-based technologies. They may pursue their studies by viewing the tutorials on a computer or mobile while connected to the internet. However, availability of computer, mobile phones and Internet is the fundamental pre requisite for E-learning. All of the participants of this study considered poverty as the main challenge to the adoption of technology assisted English language teaching. Regarding this issue, T₁ stated that:

Yes, what to say? I feel so sorry to say these things in this era. We are really feeling sorry for those students who do not have easy access to internet and devices at their home. Due to that if we use them in class those students do not feel good to be with other students those who have easy access of ICT tools. Last time I was teaching them about email writing. At first, I have asked them, "Have you ever sent any email to anybody?" Only two to three students replied and majority of students remained silent. They bowed their head down and sat quietly because they thought if they replied, 'No' their friends would laugh at them. Later I explained myself and taught them practically using my own devices. This is the real scenario.

Devkota (2021) carried a study about added inequalities through online and distance education during COVID-19 in Nepal. It concluded that students from rural Nepal who lacked access to the internet and digital devices “were left behind, experiencing online teaching and learning as unreachable for them” (p. 162). According to the participants of this study, most of the students were from a very weak economic background. The students used to reside in other's home as shelter in exchange of the household work they accomplish. They did not get sufficient time to stay in schools. They hardly got any time to study at home. Possessing mobile phones, computers or the

Internet was the matter of far away. They were taught in school using ICT tools like searching word's meaning in Internet, doing project with the help of online resources but they lacked those tools at home and felt hesitated to ask with their friends too. They used to sit in the one of the corners of the classroom and rarely responded to the teacher's questions. They were facing difficulties due to not having access of ICT tools which their teachers and friends were using.

Physical Resources

According to the teachers, they had to use many videos of native speakers to learn how they pronounce words, their cultures, civilization, and costumes and so on. But they thought that they were not getting much exposure in those web tools. Responding the question on the ICT resources and infrastructures, T₂ shared her experience:

(Laughter) You know we have a very big school building. New building, desk, benches, whiteboards etc. are all managed properly. But it is very shameful to say that I myself is not being able to conduct listening classes for grade 10 students because most of the classes of this new building too do not have power on power sockets. I have informed this subject matter to my school administration. But you know they do not take teachers as human beings. So they heard from one ear and blew it immediately by another one. This is a government school. Who listens to whom here?

Most of the teachers did not use ICT tools in their classroom because they felt uncomfortable and it was a new practice and approach for them. Rather they wanted to follow the traditional way of teaching to which they had been habituated. On the other hand the students were also not exposed to use the innovative and latest learning software, web and mobile applications and other ICT tools and platforms. Regarding the question on the relevance of video tutorials made by CDC, another participant T₃ laughed and replied:

They are only like hurried actions for formalities. Although they helped us to some extent in the time of emergency, they are not able to cover what students have to learn in the class. Language skills, functions, pronunciation are left aside while making them. So, students do not prefer watching them rather they request me to conduct classes conventionally. If those video tutorials really included all the demands of the students I am sure that our students might not have asked us to teach the lesson again.

Another major pedagogical issue is the lack of English teachers in the schools. The schools do not recruit sufficient number of teachers in time. The workload of the existing teacher increases and they become obliged to continue with their conventional techniques and procedures.

Digital Competency

Competence on Teachers: Virtual classes were only the alternative means to pursue academic activities throughout the globe after the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. Schools started to continue their academic activities via online platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Google class, ZOOM etc. Public schools in Kathmandu valley too changed their physical classes to virtual and conducted their classes. In the beginning stage it became too much difficult for the teachers even to create their user credentials in such platforms. The respondents of this study also felt some sort of difficulties regarding virtual classroom management, taking tests and exams and attendance management. Among five participants of this study two of them opined that it was very difficult for them to conduct online classes. T₄ expressed:

(Being a bit nervous and shy) Maam, it's very hard for me to say that I could not trouble shoot even the simple task related with handling online platforms such as Zoom. I felt embarrassed and could not conduct the classes throughout the whole period some times. I had to take help from my daughter occasionally. (Being angry) How can we adopt such new technologies without any training or assistance? School administration must think of preparing our capabilities rather than performing surveillance on our work.

The participants shared that many of their colleagues could not take classes properly due to the lack of sufficient knowledge, skills and competence on proper utilization of tools, platforms and technologies. However, gradually some of them continued by learning with other teachers. But still the number of teachers who hesitated to use such platforms was large, according to the participant teachers. Sudden adoption without any training and preparedness made it very difficult to the teachers. So, periodic and refresher training on the latest development in technology they thought as necessary for their update in knowledge and skills.

Competence on Students: The students who were originally from urban or more developed regions could easily access the necessary facilities for online classes. They also shared their difficulties, if any, with their friends. But, being public schools, majority of the students were from outside valley particularly from the remote villages

of Nepal. Those students could not either take classes properly or share their difficulties due to the lack of necessary resources such as computers and the Internet. T₅ shared her experiences on the low competent students as:

See, sometimes both teachers and students do not know how to handle equipment. Many class ten students did not know how to upload assignments, handle pdf files. I believe few of them even do not know till today. They lack the devices and services in which they could practice for sufficient duration. They had to take images of the loose sheets, minimize image size, convert it to pdf and then send to their teachers. But many of them failed to do so and I asked them to take help from their parents. Even their parents did not know. Later on, I asked them to show their task through camera with Viber or Messenger applications rather than uploading them.

As per the participant, the students both from within valley and from remote villages find difficulties while submitting assignments, interacting with teachers and attending their tests and exams.

Expected Goals of Curriculum

Out of three, two respondents pointed out towards existing curriculum structure of the Nepalese education system as one of the hindrances to the ICT assisted classes. The curriculum is exam oriented only and demands for both the teachers and students to prepare for better marks in the final examinations. This became the key concern of each stakeholder of education system such as school management committee, parents, students and the society as a whole. It lacks the incorporation of technology to assist in learning vocabulary, language functions, language aspects and grammar. Technology integration requires sufficient allocation of the class hours as well which is very difficult to manage. Project work, field visit and presentation should be made mandatory in the curriculum which requires the support from the proper utilization of latest technologies devised to aid the teaching learning process. Also, the traditional assessment and evaluation system needs to be revised since in this structure almost of the class hours will be finished by preparing the students for their final exams. The learning process thus remains incomplete and the huge investment of the state does not yield purposeful outcomes. Regarding the existing curriculum structure, T₂ responded that:

(Takes a sip of tea) You know, our curriculum does not match with today's world. Need based curriculum is not made till the date. Nepal government and curriculum designers design curriculum with their own interests. If Curriculum

Development Center (CDC) called the teachers like us to design the curriculum then only we could include our student's demand.

One of the teachers replied teaching English language as a very difficult job. Students must be able to learn different language than mother tongue along with different culture and costumes. So, teacher's responsibility becomes to teach them both what English is and how to use English as well. Secondary level students in public schools lack background knowledge which is a prerequisite for learning complex language functions and attributes. Students who do not have good background of English language learning at home and early grades do not prefer the use of ICT such as using video tutorials and audio materials because they will not be able to get the essence of pronunciation, punctuation and cannot separate language functions. Rather they think the use of those materials as the waste of class time. Planners, policy makers, curriculum designers must think the aspect of poor background students in secondary level while incorporating technology as the assistive means of teaching.

Besides teaching, teachers have to be involved in other school activities as well. Regarding their multiple role T₃ expressed:

Without enough time, effective and purposeful teaching materials could not be developed. It requires specific knowledge, skills and carefulness while preparing. Lacking in time is identified as one of the major barriers to the use of ICT while teaching English classes. Due to the lack of sufficient teachers in our schools, we have to take extra classes as well which compels just to continue with conventional teaching materials and methodologies.

According to the participants, they do not get sufficient time to prepare their teaching materials using ICT tools. The participants of the study therefore demanded for reducing the class load hours and instead allocating hours for preparing their ICT assisted classes.

Discussion

Based on the findings of the study, this section is an attempt to discuss the major challenges to technology assisted English language teaching and the way forward.

Joshi (2016) emphasized that students in Nepal used mobile phones as the primary means for ICT related tasks and they lacked laptops or computers. According to him, the case is more prominent with respect to the students of public schools. The students could not use related software for learning with their mobile phones. It may be

due to the poor economic condition and their parents could not afford for purchasing the computers or laptops. Many students in the public schools of Kathmandu are not just students. They have to work for their livelihood. Even if their teachers encourage them for learning English with the help of learning software or Internet, they could not do it due to unavailability of the necessary devices and resources. In contrast to urban areas, the country's rural areas continue to lack access to additional educational resources, which presents significant obstacles to learning. Poverty has posed a serious threat to the education system in Nepal. Compared to the students of private schools, students of public schools do not have access to the fundamental resources such as computer and Internet to pursue ICT assisted learning (Joshi, 2016). This issue needs to be addressed by managing well equipped e-learning labs and facilities at the school premises. Students should be allowed to stay in their English learning laboratories at schools beyond their regular class hours and even in the holidays. School Management Committees, local, provincial and federal governments should work by mutual cooperation towards attaining the goals of providing purposeful education to the students of public schools. They must incorporate technology assisted teaching practices for teaching English, so that the performance of English gets improved in public schools. The classrooms of public schools rarely include the children of local citizens. Some sort of special programs have to be designed and implemented so that the students of local communities get attracted to public schools and their parents play the role of watchdog. It helps to build cross-cultural and multilingual awareness among students of various parts of the country. Also, the mutuality between poor and rich students will be strengthened. They start to share their learning stuffs, if any and ideas among each other. Those who were well known to the technologies and devices may be asked in the classes by their teachers to assist their friends. Students who use to speak English regularly in their homes will influence their friends and those who speak very less English gets motivated from their friends. This helps to flourish collaborative learning thereby increasing the overall performance of the students.

Technology has been regarded as the essential ingredients of teaching learning process specifically after covid-19 pandemic. However, policy makers are still keeping their deaf ears towards allocation of sufficient budget for managing ICT related pedagogical infrastructures in the schools. Students have to wait until a week to enter their computer labs for learning listening skills. They have to rely on the devices in their homes which remain impossible for majority of the students of public schools. They have to share their parent's devices if any to perform their project work or accomplish

assignments using ICT. The study findings suggest that schools must modify their classroom set up with well-equipped multi-media projector, speaker and the high-speed Internet. Irrelevant web site should be blocked by the school administration to avoid technology induced abuses. For this, investment has to be increased by allocating sufficient budget. The findings of the study Baral (2022) indicated that the best alternative is to employ technology in teaching and learning since it offers chances in challenging circumstances. But it greatly divides students, as well. It is recommended that the government and university administration foster a strong learning environment among the students in order to gradually erode the divisions between them.

Teachers who have spent their years by just using blackboards, markers and chalks cannot immediately switch to the modern classroom practices. To make them habituate with the technology assisted teaching and learning they require motivation and facilitation from the school management. No one is competent by birth. Teachers who are competent in delivering lessons in science or solve complex mathematical problems may find very difficult to handle smart boards. It is all about the regularity and practice what adds confidence and competence. Teachers who are best on teaching complex English language structures and language functions may hesitate to use technological tools and platforms due to less competence or no idea at all about it. In such context they need trainings on the use of latest educational software and devices to increase their confidence and mitigate their hesitation towards not using technology in the classrooms. Periodic and refresher training to increase their skills, expertise knowledge will help a lot for proper utilization of ICT resources, as suggested by the participants of the study. Also, some sort of orientation and short training courses may be employed among the students those who do not have idea on the proper ways of handling technology in the classes. Dhital (2018) recommended that teachers in government schools be trained with ICT skills, policies should be easily convertible into action, creative awareness programs via media has to be conducted for positive attitude towards use of ICT in schools, proper financing has to be made by the government and also argued for stable power supply.

Policy reforms and stability has to be ascertained. Rana and Rana (2020) argued that in order to put the policy into effect, more long-lasting methods must be created to give instructors access to ICT resources and to teach them how to use ICT in instructional activities. The curriculum structure has to be amended time and again to incorporate the changing demands of the students and society. The curriculum has to be designed so as to integrate technology in the learning process of English language.

Allocating the hours for preparing their teaching materials as part of their work load must be addressed by the curriculum structure. Before presenting herself in the classes, each teacher must prepare their classroom materials. Grade ten students require even much attention because they are grown up students and full of queries, even teachers may not quench their thirst of knowledge and therefore their teachers have to prepare much. Preparation requires engagement of teachers with their devices for enough time. Otherwise teacher's spending a number of hours for preparing ICT assisted teaching materials will not be counted as their work loads. This discourages the teachers and the motive of utilizing the technology for teaching process will not be achieved.

Conclusions

Language teaching and its effectiveness cannot be measured simply with the help of exam grades unlike subjects of other disciplines. The capability of speaking, listening, reading and writing is explicitly observed via the presentation of the learners. Being a foreign language to the learners of both public and private schools, English language teaching is much difficult and requires specific expertise in the teachers to teach grammar and other language functions along with the culture and customs of the native speakers. ICT assisted English language teaching helps both the teachers and students to achieve their learning goals more interactively and with fun. But it is not an easy task. A number of challenges exist while implementing ICT assisted English language teaching at public schools. Poor financial status of the students leading to inaccessibility to the ICT tools and resources, lack of pedagogical infrastructures in the schools itself, less competent teachers lacking confidence to utilize the resources, improper idea on the students about the proper mode of operating tools and platforms and exam oriented, aged and conventional curriculum structure are identified as the major ones. Policy planners, implementers and the stakeholders associated with the education system must take an immediate step to address these issues so that ICT assisted English language teaching becomes effective and objective.

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