

Siddhajyoti Interdisciplinary Journal (SIJ)

Vol. VI, January 2025

(A Peer Reviewed Open Access Research Journal)

ISSN: 2645-8381

Published by Research Management Cell, Siddhajyoti Education Campus, Sindhuli

<https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/sij>

Strategies for Improving English Language of Students at Purbanchal University School of Management

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Article History: *Received:* 30 June 2024; *Reviewed:* 30 November 2024; *Accepted:* 10 December 2024

Abstract

The teachers teaching English and Principle of Management at the constituent college and affiliated colleges of Purbanchal University were interviewed to identify and enhance the English language efficiency of Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) students. As such, this paper presents strategies for improving English language of students at Purbanchal University School of Management. Besides, the paper also highlights this dual strength of the Nepali language and English language for learning and understanding lessons and or any topic outside the classroom.

Keywords: English language teaching, English medium instruction, English as a foreign language, Nepali medium of instruction

Introduction

Nepal is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country where Nepali language binds all Nepalis together. Regarding its nationality, Nepali is used as an official language in government offices while English is used as a foreign language and/or as an international language (Saud, 2020) in schools and colleges. Students from government schools prefer Nepali to English while in private schools, students learn through English medium of instruction (EMI) and they are more comfortable in English than Nepali. After their Intermediate levels of study, they join our college Purbanchal University School of Management (PUSOM), Nepal for Bachelor of Business Administration Programme (BBA) where both mediums of instruction are practised, yet students from the Nepali medium face problems with the English language.

It is for those students who belong to multi-lingual communities, and who have difficulty in learning the English language. In a recent report, British Council also commits towards equitable, inclusive, and quality education by recognizing linguistic diversity as resources for learning. Since teaching language in the mother tongue to improve learning is beneficial, experts are making reports to train teachers to learn 10 local languages out of 124. Educators need to address this population of students to learn the language, the use of

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Siddhajyoti Interdisciplinary Journal (Peer reviewed), Volume VI, January 2025

Nepali language (other than the minority language) in English class would be beneficial and practical.

This research paper explores strategies to build students' confidence and enhance their English language competency. The designed plans aim to encourage students to develop comprehensive speaking and writing skills in English, while also promoting the use of Nepali. Additionally, the paper highlights the dual strength of both the Nepali and English languages in facilitating learning and understanding lessons, as well as in engaging with topics outside the classroom. The objectives of the study are twofold: first, to support students in using both English and Nepali effectively; and second, to explore strategies for improving students' language competencies.

Literature Review

English Language Teaching (ELT) in Nepal is interesting and challenging as well. Though it is our second language, the medium of instruction is English in private school and college. It is interesting for students who learn English as a first language in schools. They are comfortable with English rather than Nepali. The students who study in public schools have difficulty with the ELT. They show their efficiency in Nepali and other subjects but need to improve in English. As a result, some students who have English and non-English backgrounds.

Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL)

Sharma (2006) clarifies, 'people from rural set up usually have their schooling at government aided community schools and their English is structurally very fragile whereas most of the people from urban setting have education from English medium schools and their English expression is better.' In another study, Sharma (2006), supports the fact, that people from rural settings usually have their schooling at government aided community schools and their English is structurally very fragile whereas most of the people urban setting have education from English medium schools and their English expression is better. Even today, there are diverse students from different regions and schools enrolled at PU. So, most of the teachers are dealing with English and non-English background students. It is a challenge and problem for the students and teachers. Despite this, teaching English as a second language is highly accepted and appreciated in the universities.

In countries where more than one language is spoken, the education system is challenged, a question, which language should be used in schools and colleges. A common approach in multilingual communities is bilingual education where instructors use the official language and English as a second language (while multilingual teaching is approaching in this century). The fact is all students are not privileged to study English as a second language. They need to learn in circumstances similar to those of first language acquisition. Schools and colleges have been making their efforts to enhance their learning ability. The students can enroll in English Medium of Instruction (EMI) and Nepali Medium of Instruction (NMI). English language is used as specified while in NMI, the Nepali language is used to explain the lessons. Poudel (2010) also points out, 'The medium of instruction was English but they interpreted in Nepali more frequently...the teachers explained or responded in both English and Nepali.' Thus, there still exists the gap in acquiring English as a second language.

Strategies to Learn English Naturally

There are several ways to learn the language. There are different writers who have researched as how to improve the students' learning ability of the language. One of the most practical ways is using dictionary for the real world. For example, Cowle (2013), 'Do you have effective materials and approaches, or even time, for authentic English in the classroom? Using examples from the Collins English for Life: skill series, this session looks at the importance of preparing students for the real world. How can we help students develop strategies to understand and produce natural English in the context of an ever-changing global language.?' Our students will ever be updated developing the habit of using examples from the dictionary to prepare for the real world. However, a space should be arranged so that they can exercise their learning.

As stated by, Yi (2012) secondly a lack of a comfortable learning environment. So, it is the institution and the teacher that should think of creating a learning environment. The university can arrange a center where students can build a friendly space for better learning. A learning environment could be set up for the students to have a good rapport with teachers and thus a better understanding of the material. Chris Hale (2006), examined the fact, 'Rather I wanted to see in what ways students with different learning styles and philosophies could find value in SELF ACCESS Learning. The decision to create and maintain a self-access center in a Japanese High School has not been without challenges. The principal among these has been to convince colleagues and school administrators that providing a place where students are in control of their own learning is beneficial to the students and the institution. According to Littlejohn (1995), for a self-access center to be effective it is imperative that teachers in the institution where it exists actually believe in it and promote it.'

Societally, we can create an open mind for the learners outside the classroom. As Roberts and Wibbens (2010) state, 'We have reason to believe that learning occurs in a social context. Everyday students and teachers engage one another in classroom communities, using all forms of literacy – reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and creating – to communicate and learn. The utilization of peer groups and collaboration supports writing by offering a potentially nonthreatening audience, immediate feedback, experience with a wide range of writing abilities, reduced writing apprehension, development of positive attitudes about writing, increased motivation to revise and development of cooperation and interpersonal skills (Hillocks, 1986; Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2007).' In this way, the learning can happen without any pressure. It generates the capacity to provide feedback and ensures the acceptability of constructive comments.

The another advantage of learning language naturally is working in a team. It is a social skill that they need to interact in the workplace in the future. Tomlinson (2015) 'Cooperative learning is explained in the activities and is a method which teaches social skills along with language or other subjects. Students learn to develop 'positive interdependence' in group work and the groups are structured in such a way that everyone has to take part. In addition, learners help each other to reach a common goal and learn from each other. As learners interact in the target language and take on responsibilities, they also develop respect for each other and their capabilities, making it easier to use learners as resources in the classroom.'

Further, students can consider and explore language learning both personally and professionally. Besides its usage in the classroom, learning English can be exploited in starting their jobs and developing their careers. Ghanbari and Rasekh (2012) justify, 'A significant aspect of language instruction at a tertiary level is learning English for a given purpose, with the specific aim of getting to know specialized vocabulary, increasing one's knowledge of the subject matter by reading in English and being able to use the language in the prospective profession or study areas by becoming prepared for some common situations such as carrying out higher level studies, going for an interview or conducting professional correspondence (Varnosfadrani, 2009).'

Veitch (2021) mentions that language excludes students with strong content knowledge skills but weak or insufficient English skills. EMI is a cause and outcome of the commercialisation of higher education. EMI hinders learning by inhibiting the transfer of knowledge between content lecturers using EMI and their students.' Thus, it is practical to use the Nepali language to assist the students in general in understanding the core of the content. Galloway and Sahan (2021) in their research confirmed that, 'Language use as in the first study, our findings highlight that both English and the local language are used. Further, students and teachers report differences in the amount of English used. Both were in support of an English-only approach to EMI because it would help improve English learning, but also L1 use because it would help content understanding.' However, in this study, we refer to the use of our national language to understand English content. Promoting and encouraging local languages is highly appreciated but would be critical and challenging to use it academically in higher education.

Methods and Procedures

The nature of the research is qualitative. The study comprised words of information. As the term suggests, qualitative is derived from quality. McDonald and Headlam (1996) simply state, "Qualitative—concerned with quality of information. Qualitative methods attempt to gain an understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations for actions and establish how people interpret their experiences and the world around them. Qualitative methods provide insights into the setting of a problem, generating ideas and or hypotheses." This research is employs descriptive design. These teaching experiences are described as producing new teaching techniques and new ideas for English language skills. Data were drawn from two sources: secondary and primary sources. Secondary data can be obtained from print sources like books, journals, and magazines. This study obtained primary sources of information from interview in the sense of an oral questionnaire. One reason that people are more willing to talk than to write. Best (1995) presents, 'Interviews are used to gather information regarding an individual's experience and knowledge; his or her opinions, beliefs, and feelings; and demographic data. Interview questions can be asked so as to determine past or current information, as well as predictions for the future.' The seven colleges for the study are from the regions such as Dharan 1, Birtamod 1, Itahari 1 and Biratnagar 4. Interview questions were semi-structured in nature. O'Leary (2011) suggests, "use of a flexible structure, interviewers can start with a defined questioning plan, but will shift in order to follow the natural flow of conversation. Interviewers may also deviate from the plan to pursue interesting tangents." Ten questions were framed to draw the desired answers from the respondents. The

time allotted for each participant was 3 – 5 minutes. The call was made at least three times.

Results and Discussion

Much of the answers document the use of similar teaching techniques. The teachers in Province I possess their unique style of teaching provided the students understand the lessons. After analyzing the respondents' answers, we found that teaching English and Principle of Management proved the following facts categorically. The respondents happened to be the faculties from the constituent and affiliated colleges of Purbanchal University. They shared their teaching experiences of teaching English at BBA level. The questions for the interview were simple and direct for the interviewee to respond easily and promptly. The questions were logically structured from personal to general order. The themes under discussion are presented accordingly.

Experiences of the English Teachers

All teachers (respondents) shared their delightful experiences teaching English at BBA level of the university curriculum. They found it challenging and innovative as well, as it aims to improve the learner's language skills through textual reading materials and compositional tips on how to write articles and essays. Two of the respondents showed a sharp dissatisfaction over general aspects of the course not catering to the needs of management students. They found the learners reluctant and struggled hard to make them realize the relevancy of the course. It was challenging to let them feel the objective of the course. Anyway, they earned an experience dealing with the course content.

Method of Teaching

A wide spectrum of the innovative methods was practised by faculties dealing with English as a subject of study. They used right from the lecture method, the most common method, to interactive, learners-oriented method. Discussion, question-answer series, role play, quiz and questionnaires are some of them. They opted for the method as per the lesson to be taught. Presentation and demonstration happened to be the teacher's favorite methods of dealing with the course content. They showed flexibility in choosing a method to deal with. It was experimental and instrumental for the faculties to go ahead with their jobs.

Responses of the Students

Most of the responses were found to be positive. A good number of students were at ease with English as a medium of instruction as they came from English medium schools. They were habituated in using skills of English language. They comprehended the materials taught by their teachers comfortably well whereas those students who came from Nepali speaking background were not so prompt in reply. The number of such students was noticeably poor. Most of them forwarded timely response as per their level of understanding and it was really inspiring for faculties.

Multilingual Approach

In interacting with students, the faculties usually prefer English as a medium of instruction guided by the status of the course and the title of the subject which is English. It is welcome by most students who have been habituated to interact in English. They were fond of it. But it not effective for those who are poor in English. They have not been used to speak and listen in English. Since the stuff or content was needed to be delivered and understood by the students, the faculties facilitate them with speaking in Nepali or in a language the learners are comfortable with. They need to speak to them in languages like

Hindi, Nepali and Maithili, to make them understand the matter. This multilingual approach is truly commendable so far as the true aim of education is concerned. In Nepal, where English is a foreign language is categorized as a secondary language often known as a link language, we cannot expect all the learners to be versed with this competency in English. It depends on the environment as well as the requirements of the learners. We have been accepting multiculturalism. The students bring in their multicultural experiences to the classroom and teachers need to recognize and appreciate this society. Ryuko (2010) 'while liberal multiculturalism values and appreciates cultural differences, it also supports the idea that all people, regardless of their backgrounds, are equal and should have equal opportunities in society. This egalitarianism leads to the view that everyone's academic and economic success is dependent upon his or her own effort. In short, liberal multiculturalism promotes tolerance, acceptance, and respect toward different cultures and culturally diverse people while supporting equality among them.'

Bilingual Approach

Language learning and teaching has been a sensible task that results in the communicative competency of the students. To this query whether they speak English or Nepali to communicate with their students the respondents except Kasturi College, Itahari were found using both English and Nepali. This bilingual approach raises the prospect of English teaching and learning activities. It was a rational approach as a matter of fact based upon tried and trusted method.

Incompetency in English Language

To the query regarding the cause of poor communication skills in English the respondents stood on two different sides – the one who blames the language teaching style adopted in the lower and higher classes of school. The teachers teach English as a formal and bread-winning language, never as an integral unavoidable language for the learners. Students were made to feel that they were learning a foreign tongue which hampered their natural reception of a language. Another side blamed the environment as well as course content saying it a subjective rather than objective. Lack of practice in English grammar and composition, punctuation, vocabulary, and structure has been noticed in the response.

Ways and Means to Improve the Competency

Almost all of the faculty members consistently mentioned that they make various efforts to enhance the communicative skills of their students. These efforts include activities such as group discussions, pair work, role plays, talk programs, delivering speeches, debates, quiz contests, presentations, and question-answer sessions. Additionally, some faculty members have arranged extra classes on weekends to focus on grammar, composition, and structure. Weekly discussion classes and presentations were also organized to further support students' language development. These combined efforts have undoubtedly contributed to improving the learners' efficiency in the English language.

Challenges in Teaching

Respondents overall faced the challenges when their students failed to grasp their lectures in English. The course demands English as the medium instruction but it does not help in practice. They said they used Nepali language even the local languages to make their students understand the matter delivered. Most of the students fell in this category. It certainly added fresh challenges to the faculties.

Strategies for Improvements

Teaching English does not mean to underscore the language spoken by learners at home. Rather it needs somewhat like a fusion between these two. Let English be a target language to communicate with the world and the other native local languages act in support. They cannot be overtaken by the towering personality of English. They have their distinctive roles to play in the overall language learning process. They enjoy freedom, fullness and satisfaction expressed in their reasonable or native languages. This would be a better approach as recommended by all respondents in the panel to learning a foreign tongue.

Experiences of Principle of Management (POM) Teachers

POM is a very interesting subject. Management teachers enjoy teaching the philosophical and theoretical part of the course. From the interview, the answers showed satisfactory teaching experiences. Since the students are fresh from schools, the teachers use the lecture method in the beginning of their classes. Gradually, to make it practical, they exercise the following teaching pedagogy - case studies/ group discussions/ role plays/ presentations/ quiz. Today, students are knowledgeable. They enjoy learning and easily grasp the lessons. So, teachers engage them with activities and assignments. It is a true learning and growing process. Fortunately, the teachers have received good and positive response from the students.

Dual Medium of Instruction (MI)

Schools and colleges in Nepal have provision for both English Medium of Instruction (EMI) and Nepali Medium of Instruction (NMI). Students are privileged with EMI in private schools and colleges. While in government institutions, students receive education in NMI. So, when students come from diverse background culturally and regionally, to PUSOM it is convenient to explain in Nepali language. The students feel this learning environment more informal and comfortable.

Depending on the nature of students and teachers, EMI ranges at a maximum of 100% - 80% and NMI from a maximum of 100% to a minimum of 20%. Besides to meet the levels of the remaining students, the teachers use both Nepali and English language to make the class interactive and understandable.

Students are from diverse background. There are students from Itahari who are different from other regions of Nepal. They are not familiar with management literature. In order to explain the content of the curriculum we need to explain in Nepali language. All communications happen in the English language but in some cases to make the students understand any confusing topic, the Nepali language is also used. There are students from Siraha, Saptahri and Lahan; they are unfamiliar and uncomfortable with the English language. So, the teachers need to communicate in the local language as well. They are teachers who are not only bi-lingual, they practise multilingualism as well. They do not hesitate to teach in any language. Though the medium of language is basically English, often they speak in Nepali language and sometimes in particular Maithili too. To which Subedi (2019) claims, 'English teaching should be made locally accessible as an easy means of learning.' When we speak in the national, particularly local language to understand the subjects then actually we are preserving and promoting our minority languages. Kafle (2019) justifies the fact that 'English can thrive alongside Nepali...'

Shohamy (2010) has noted the lines of Crowley, 'that even in societies that insist on monolingual policies and ideologies as part of national identity, the reality is that there is constant influence and mixing with other languages, vernacular and global.' This study proves we can understand a second language in the local language and or in our mother tongue.

Mixed Ability Level of Students

Students from remote areas like Panchthar, and Taplejung join colleges in the city area. One of the main problems is the language barrier. Our aim is to explain and complete the course. The ability of students differs – the English medium students write better than Nepali medium students. As such, they have difficulty in explaining in English language. However, Nepali medium students are hardworking and laborious. The latter students, when they must give a presentation, they put their effort into translating the English word to Nepali. This becomes very clear to the faculty and the class.

Mixed ability classes are challenging for teachers. The teachers have encountered various problems caused by a mixed ability level of students. The students in the classroom are diverse in terms of culture, language proficiency, learning styles, motivating factors, and adaptability, which creates several challenges for teachers. One of the main issues is the language barrier that affects students at all levels. Many students have become accustomed to being passive learners, relying heavily on notes and not engaging in independent learning. This dependency continues into their undergraduate studies, where they still seek notes instead of developing their own understanding. Additionally, students' attitudes and perceptions vary, especially between private and public school backgrounds, which adds complexity to teaching practices.

To address these challenges, teachers adopt several strategies. They encourage students to write their own notes, providing feedback and comments to enhance their learning process. In order to support weaker students, teachers arrange compensatory or preparatory classes at the beginning of the semester to bring them up to the average level before starting lessons for the entire class. Teachers also dedicate time to get to know their students, create a conducive learning environment, and prepare appropriate learning materials. They recognize the importance of being sensitive in their communication, as some students may feel demotivated or inferior compared to faster learners who adapt more quickly.

Challenges in Teaching the Students

Students come from diverse regions and speak different languages, which presents an environmental challenge. Many of them choose to study management based on affordability rather than genuine interest. Academically, a significant challenge arises from limited seats in the program, leaving many strong candidates unable to join. From a management perspective, the inability to provide the promised facilities during admission also creates difficulties. A key challenge is ensuring all students are treated equally, as faculty must provide equal attention and support to every student. The root cause of the English language problem also stems from the teachers. A major challenge is that students often hesitate to speak in English, which hinders their language development. Additionally, there is a shortage of English-medium teachers, and those who are available need to improve their effectiveness in enhancing students' language proficiency.

Resolving Challenges in Teaching the Students

To bring students to the same level, teachers can start by asking why they have chosen the BBA program. By understanding their motivations and vision for studying the program, teachers can tailor their approach accordingly. This can involve getting to know the students individually, assessing their specific needs, and providing motivation to help them stay engaged. Teachers can also take on the role of a mentor, guiding students through their academic journey. Additionally, fostering a reading and writing culture and offering students platforms to showcase their skills and talents can further support their growth and development in the program.

To overcome the challenge, first we need to enhance the efficiency of the teachers who then will improve the efficiency of the students. Most teachers provide notes to score good marks. However, when they are asked to write independently, they have difficulty in writing. So, we should arrange presentations and group discussion and activities in which they can exercise their writing and speaking skill. They should be asked to write frequently, making their writings grammatically correct.

Helping the Learners Learn

Choosing the best teaching method has proven to be challenging in all the interviews, as each teacher is committed to providing the best education for their students. Every teacher has their own approach to delivering lessons, and the most effective method often depends on the subject, the teacher, and the students themselves. However, one of the most practical and effective strategies is to focus on helping learners actively engage in the learning process. Teachers, as a whole, have suggested several approaches to improve teaching, including using simple language in the classroom, shuffling the class to encourage participation from minority groups in activities and assignments, managing time effectively for extra classes, and speaking in Nepali when needed for the convenience of the students.

Two-Language Policy

Besides the pragmatic teaching techniques that are desirous today the teachers are coping with to deal with the mixed ability level of students. Each teacher has put in their personal effort to teach considering the levels of the students. All teachers face the similar problem dealing with below average, average, and above-average students. In addition to the existence bilingualism and multilingualism in the classrooms, Paudel (2019) 'for Nepal, three language policies (mother tongue, Nepali and English) can be a pragmatic policy for placing English in multicultural and multilingual contexts.' This study has shown the fact that there are teachers who speak the three languages. However, it would not be practical for the teachers to exercise the three-language policy. While, this study identifies the fact that it is common for a teacher to speak in both English and Nepali language to learn English.

Strategies of Improving the English Language Competencies of the Students

Students should be taught in a friendly manner. Improvement starts with teachers so there should be provision for Teacher Training. One of the best strategies is to encourage those students to express themselves in English. Initially, the students are allowed to express the content of the lesson in Nepali. It is a useful way to ready them into speaking another language. Next step is to prepare the students that they must speak and write in English. This encouraging environment gradually prepares the students to develop the habit of speaking in English. Besides, regular assignments should benefit the competency of the students.

A criterion should be developed for internal Assessment to assess the students' speaking and writing skill. This could enhance the competency of the students. PU should organize workshop for an interactive learning. The students can exercise their speaking and writing skills that they would use in their profession. It would hone their business correspondence in their job and career. In addition, to build efficiency in English students are suggested to read English newspaper, editorial to be specific.

Establishing Language Laboratory

Do we genuinely need a language laboratory? The responses from the participants were mixed. Those in favor of establishing such a facility highlighted several benefits. They described it as a valuable idea to set up a center equipped with the latest technological tools, such as multimedia and A-V systems, to enhance language learning. An English Language Teaching (ELT) center would particularly benefit first-semester BBA students by improving their language competencies. Establishing such a center at PUSOM and in affiliated colleges would help students better understand and learn general subjects. Many agreed that it is a brilliant and beneficial idea. On the other hand, some respondents expressed affirmative doubts, noting that while the idea is positive, its success depends on how effectively it is implemented. They suggested that while this idea could be beneficial for students, its feasibility would vary across different colleges. To ensure its effectiveness, they proposed pre-evaluating students' language proficiency during the admission period and arranging an induction class lasting 10-15 days before the course begins. This preparatory period could help improve student competencies before moving forward with the credit course.

The idea to establish a laboratory is good especially and it benefits the students. The laboratory is an academic period set aside for laboratory work, where students practice their field of study. Outside the classroom, the students can interact freely without any hesitation. The laboratory at the affiliated colleges can similarly create a learning environment to support learning of the language. All students have their preferences about the subjects. Each of them is skilled in one or the other subjects. Despite it we need to be efficient in English and Nepali languages. In fact, the students who are proficient in English they may have to communicate in Nepali in government offices while students with Nepali proficiency, may have the opportunity to work at multinational companies. Here, is the requirement of both the languages. So, the students can facilitate each other on the basis of their capacity. As faculties, we can organize and conduct sessions for discussion on any topic of interest to the class.

In second language education, teachers must advocate for minority students by stepping outside the classroom to engage both average students and teachers in critical learning about cultural and linguistic diversity. It is essential to emphasize the importance of working with minority students as equal partners in the language laboratory. This study suggests the implementation of several strategies to enhance language learning: (a) the laboratory can assess students' language competency, (b) it can provide targeted language training, and (c) it can support the use of both English and Nepali, fostering a more inclusive and effective teaching and learning environment.

These proven facts support the idea of establishing a language laboratory. Similarly, Nicola and Kari (2021) found that, 'Staff and students in interviews identified other forms of language support for students, including: • academic advisers • English centers or clubs on campus • online resources and courses for self-study • external resources, outside the

university.’ The study strictly adheres to the last finding that building a link with external resources, outside the university. In fact, this kind of clubs, pragmatic resources provide a learning community. Donald (2000) suggests, ‘Having a learning community means a sense of relatedness among learners, a more democratic rather than hierarchical approach to learning, and an openness to experience and to others (Donald, 1997). It is collaborative and consistent with the fact that the student learning environment extends beyond an individual course.’

Conclusion

The job to improve English language competency of the students is obviously challenging yet not impossible. The faculties shared their wise and timely opinion and recommendation for improving ELT. They showed their interest for setting up language laboratory with up-to-date technology, smart digital display both audio and video will be available along with internet connectivity to keep pace with the world. In addition, there can be use of both English and Nepali language as per the need and convenience of the teacher and student. A favorable working time will be adjusted with the faculty and students.

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