

**Research Article**

**Factors Affecting English Language Teaching and Learning**

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**Abstract**

This article explores the adversities faced by public school students in learning English in their learning context. The main purpose of this study was to explore the causes of learning difficulties in English. The design of the study was qualitative. Three teachers who have been teaching in secondary level for long time had been taken as a sample of the study. In-depth interview was used as a tool for data collection. The interview was taken in two phases. The collected information through the in-depth interviews was transcribed and coded to develop the themes. Three themes were developed through this study; English learning has been difficult for the learners because of the overuse of students' mother tongue; not resourceful classroom and lack of materials is another cause for poor performance of the learners and lack of time for practicing the English language. Through the findings and results it had been concluded that English should be taught in English and there should be the use of varieties of techniques and materials to support the English learning of the learners.

**Keywords:** English Language Teaching; Affecting Factors; Exposure

**1. Introduction**

There are several factors responsible for teaching and learning English. And learning foreign language is not an easy task. It may be affected by the age of the learners, motivation, learning context and so on. Learning a foreign language is a complex brain activity that involves listening, speaking, reading and writing. Many factors affect the process of learning a second language including self-confidence, age, exposure and the method of learning.

As is commonly stated in the literature, second language acquisition (SLA) refers to the process of acquiring a second language alongside the native tongue (Hoque, 2019; Saville-Troike, 2006). In contrast to learning, this process occurs spontaneously and naturally. SLA is the study of how learners acquire a second language (L2) in addition to their first language (L1). Although it is referred to as Second Language Acquisition, it is the process of acquiring any language after the first, be it the second, third, or fourth. Thus, any language other than the native tongue is referred to as a second language (SL) or target language (TL) (Stefánsson, 2013).

Many individuals are introduced to an L2 after they have attained native proficiency in their L1. If you have attempted to master a second language as an adult, you have undoubtedly found it to be a challenge unlike any other you encountered when learning your first language. Unlike L1 acquisition, which is uniformly successful in children and languages, adults vary substantially in their ability to completely acquire an L2 (Fromkin et al., 2019). Almost impossible if a process is not impacted by any factors. Regardless of whether we intend it or not, there must be certain aspects of the process that result from all potential influences. Obviously, this applies to the process of learning a new language. Internal and external factors are considered in this process. These two factors are outlined by a number of specific factors.

English is used as a foreign language in Nepal. It is taught as a school subject. Though English is taught and learnt in Nepal from class 1 to Bachelor level as a compulsory subject. Many students find it as a difficult subject. A considerable number of students fail their Exams because of English. The students are suffering by various problems and they are facing the challenging of SEE, SLC and graduate Examinations being failure in English. For the better academic achievements of the learners, it is necessary to implement innovative and engaging pedagogies. This study also recommends some learner-friendly strategies of learning the English language. The study has the following objectives: a) to explore the factors causing difficulty in learning English, and b) to suggest some pedagogical implications on the basis of findings.

## **2. Literature Review**

Second language acquisition (SLA) is basically a term to describe the process of getting a new language besides the first language (Richards et al., 1985). Ellis (1985) & Omaggio (1986) stated that the SLA process occurs spontaneously and naturally within the subconsciousness. In acquiring a second language, it is impossible if it is not influenced by some factors during the process. According to Ellis (1985), there are many influencing factors on SLA in general such as age, aptitude, intelligence, cognitive style, attitudes, motivation and personality.

Based on a study by Sun (2019) regarding the factors affecting SLA, there are internal factors and external factors. The internal factor comes from the learner or individual, while the external factor comes from the environment or the individual's surroundings (Mirhadizadeh, 2016). The aim of this session is to present these factors and their contribution to success or failure in second language acquisition.

Motivation is one of the most important factors in second language acquisition. Richards (1985, p. 185) believes motivation as a factor that determines a person's desire to do something. It is obvious that learners who want to learn are likely to achieve more than those who do not. The role of attitudes and motivation in SLA has been investigated by Gardner and Lambert (1972), who define motivation in terms of 'the learner's overall goal or orientation', and attitude as 'the persistence shown by the learner in striving for a goal' (Ellis 1985, p. 117)

Ellis (1985, p. 292) clarifies that attitude is sets of beliefs about factors as the target language culture, their own culture and, in case of classroom learning, of their teachers, and the learning task they are given. Language attitudes are the attitude which speakers of different languages have toward other's languages or to their own language. Expression of positive or negative feelings toward a language may reflect impression of linguistic difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degrees of important, social status, etc (Richards, 1985, p. 155).

Aptitude refers to specific ability a learner has for learning a second language (Ellis, 1986, p. 293). Richards (1985, p. 154) explains that aptitude is natural ability to learn a language. Further he adds that language aptitude is thought to be a combination of various abilities, such as the ability to identify sound pattern in a new language, the ability to recognize the different of grammatical functions of words in sentences, etc. Students need aptitude - some specific abilities, which are responsible for learning languages.

Learning style is also called cognitive style. It is the particular way in which a learner tries to learn something. In L2 or foreign language learning, different learner may prefer different solution to learning problems. Some learners may want explanations for grammatical rules (audio learners), some may feel writing down words and sentences help them to remember (kinesthetic learners). And others may find they remember things better if they are associated with picture (visual learners) (Richards: 1985, p. 45). Ellis (1986, p. 299) mentions that learning style or strategy accounts for how learners accumulate new L2 rules and how they automate existing ones.

Keefe (1979, as cited in Ellis 1994, p. 499) described learning styles as “the characteristic cognitive, affective, and physiological behaviors that serve relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment.” Students’ learning styles can be influenced by many factors among which are their genetic background, their culture and previous learning experience. It is said that if teachers match their teaching methods to the students’ learning styles, the students will be more successful and more interested in the language.

Reid (1987) identified four learning modalities: visual (seeing), auditory (listen-ing), kinesthetic (moving) or tactile (touching). Visual learners learn through seeing. They prefer to see a teacher during a lesson, learn by visuals: pictures, wall displays, diagrams, videos. They make notes during lectures and use lists to organize their thoughts. Auditory learners learn through listening. They prefer verbal instructions, like dialogues, discussions and plays, solve problems by talking about them, use rhythm and sound as memory aids. Kinesthetic learners learn through moving and doing. They learn best when they are active. It is difficult for them to sit still for long periods. Tactile learners learn through touching. They use writing and drawing. They learn well in hands-on activities like projects and demonstrations.

Greey (1994) defines culture as a learned system of values, beliefs and/or norms among a group of people. Cultural and status differences may affect second language acquisition because of the intercultural competence in which students may perceive that cultural and social differences cause a sense of alienation during the second language learning process (Kuo & Lai, 2006). In this regard, understanding the culture of the target language is an important element in achieving the success of acquiring a second language. Moreover, culture in language learning is not an expendable skill (Kramsch, 1993, 2013). In achieving true linguistic comprehension, culture and language should be learned together.

People need some degree of self-esteem, self-confidence in order to succeed in any activity. Coopersmith (1967, as cited in Brown 1994, p. 137) provided the following definition of self-esteem: “By self-esteem, we refer to the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself; it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicates the extent to which an individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy.” People develop their sense of self-esteem as a result of the information they receive about them-selves from others. Williams and Burden (1997) present social comparison theory that claims that classroom interactions have a great influence on how learners perceive their abilities. Their sense of achievement is strongly

affected by the information they get from the teacher and their peers in the classroom. Teachers should realize that they influence not only students' academic performance but also their emotional states. They should create such atmosphere in the classroom that will help to build students' confidence and lead them to success. The results of the research suggest that self-esteem is an important variable in SLA. Many studies show a positive relationship between high self-esteem and academic achievement (Brodkey & Shore, 1976; Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

Anxiety is another important aspect of personality that affects learning a foreign language. Brown (1994, p. 141) describes anxiety as a state of mind connected with "feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt and worry." MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) distinguish anxiety into: trait anxiety, when some people have some general predisposition to be anxious and state anxiety, which can be experienced in a particular situation. They also identify three components of foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative social evaluation and test anxiety. Although anxiety is regarded as a negative factor which must be avoided, the concept of facilitative anxiety, "a little nervous tension in the process", is a positive factor. It must be remembered that "both too much and too little anxiety may hinder the process of successful second language learning" (Brown, 1994, p. 143). There has been some research that investigated the reasons of the state anxiety in the classroom. Bailey (1983) found that competitiveness among students, their relation-ship with a teacher and tests could increase anxiety.

The other aspect of personality that has been studied is empathy – "the willingness and capacity to identify with others" (Stern, 1993, p. 381). It is perceived as an important factor in learning a foreign language but only as far as communication skills are concerned as it involves the participation in other people's feelings and ideas. Some studies tried to link empathy with the acquisition of the native-like pronunciation (Guiora, 1972; Guiora et al., 1972) but it is considered as "an essential factor in the overall ability to acquire a second language rather than simply in the ability to acquire an authentic pronunciation" (Schumann, 1975, p. 226).

Personality is the factor that affects the second language learning. It is described as a set of features that characterize an individual. Personality is difficult to define and measure because of its complicated nature. There are some personalities that affect most SLAs such as self-esteem, empathy, anxiety, as well as Inhibition and Risk-Taking. Self-esteem refers to a personal evaluation and judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the individual's attitude towards him or herself or his or her capabilities, while empathy is the willingness and capacity

to identify with others (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Stern, 1983). Besides, anxiety is described as a state of mind connected with “feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt and worry” (Brown, 1994). Inhibition and risk-taking are the willingness of a learner in encouraging their language production without worrying about making a mistake. Many researchers believe that personality has an important influence on success in language learning. Ellis (1985, p. 119) claims that the effects of personality on SLA are difficult to investigate because these factors are not easy to define and measure as most of the tests used lack validity. Most of personality traits are not stable and may change depending on a situation. The same student may behave differently in a similar setting only because of some external reasons like mood or tiredness.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

Humanist learning theory is a whole-person approach to education that centers on the individual learners and their needs, and that considers affective as well as cognitive aspects of learning. At its essence, “Humanism in education traditionally has referred to a broad, diffuse outlook emphasizing human freedom, dignity, autonomy, and individualism” (Lucas, 1996). Humanism centers the individual person as the subject and recognizes learners as whole beings with emotional and affective states that accompany their cognitive development. Recognizing the role of students’ emotions means understanding how those emotions impact learning. Hence, this theory has the connection to this study as it talks about the factors associated with learners.

Similarly, everyone learns differently, and understanding the different ways of learning is crucial to educational success. By understanding how learning happens, educators can maximize their efforts and create learner-friendly atmosphere in classrooms where learners can thrive. This study has also the connection to transformative learning theory in the sense that it focuses on adult education and learning styles of youngsters. Jack Mezirow is the founder of the transformative learning who believes that learners can adjust their thinking based on new information. Due to the different affecting factors learners either transform positive or negative elements in new learning.

### **Empirical Reviews**

Ellis, (1985) *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Highlights language as process of bridging gaps between two languages where there is an acquisition process of meeting with unfamiliar letters and structure which are challenging. That is to say, in the context of this study, learning English language for Nepalese students in EFL context is really challenging due to the different types of problems, obstacles, difficulties etc. Thus, it is necessary to be

carried out ample researches to find out suitable pedagogical implications to overcome such types of challenges.

Joshi (2017) had drawn the similar result from his study and stated, "Lack of motivation, less exposure of English from teachers and students, problems in the active participation of the students in classroom activities and difficulties in making students understand the subject matter are the major challenges of teaching faced by English teachers". Sometimes the teachers themselves can also be the problems for students. One of the participants who is also the former head teacher of that school stated, "Both more knowledgeable and less knowledgeable teachers can be the problem of students because more knowledgeable teachers do not get the exact problem of the students and less knowledgeable teachers do not deliver enough information about the subject matter". According to his experience, the teachers with medium level Knowledge but laborious ones are successful in their profession.

Research on Nepal's primary school students' learning preferences has provided important new information about the nation's educational system. Significant differences were found when Sharma and Rai (2015) compared the prevalence of various learning styles among Nepali primary school pupils in urban and rural settings. According to their findings, primary school students in urban schools are more likely to choose kinesthetic learning styles, whilst those in rural regions are more likely to favor visual and auditory learning styles. The impact of cultural influences on learning styles among primary school students in the Kathmandu Valley was also examined in a more recent study (Gurung & Shrestha, 2020). Their study demonstrated how cultural practices, such community-based learning, have a big influence on how people like to learn. Additionally, another study investigated the connection between Nepalese primary kids' learning styles and the instructional strategies used by their teachers (Bhattarai & Adhikari, 2017). They discovered that the kinesthetic and auditory learning styles frequently seen in Nepali primary school students are well suited to an interactive teaching style. These empirical research highlight how crucial it is to take cultural and regional aspects into account when creating educational strategies that work for Nepali primary school students' learning preferences (Sharma & Rai, 2015; Gurung & Shrestha, 2020; Bhattarai & Adhikari, 2017). Although the general elements of children's learning styles are the focus of this research, little is known about the affecting factors which cause difficulty in learning English in EFL context in Nepal. I will fill this knowledge gap with my research.

### **3. Materials and Methods**

The researcher has adopted an interpretative research paradigm to conduct this study because it assumes a relativist ontology, a subjective epistemology, and a naturalistic set of

methodological procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To find out the factors hindering in learning and teaching English, the researcher took the interview of three English teachers who had been teaching English in government schools of Nepal more than five years. The researcher had critically thought before assessing the responses of the teachers. The information regarding affecting factors and their effects on teaching and learning had generated by analyzing and interpreting individual teacher's responses. While interpreting the data, I assumed the multiple truths of social realities. In this sense, this study has been guided by an interpretive research paradigm.

This qualitative study is based on phenomenological study that is based on the lived experience of the Secondary level English teachers who have been teaching English for many years. Defining phenomenology, Maruna and Butler (2005,p.2) write, 'Phenomenology... simply refers to the description and understanding of lived human experience through observable forms of immediate cognitive experience and reflective analysis.' The phenomenological approach is viewed as the highly appropriate means to research human experience (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000) due to which this design was selected for this study.

To explore the affecting factors of teaching English in secondary level which have been causing difficulty, I selected three secondary level English language teachers teaching at public schools purposively as the participants. Phenomenological samples are nearly always purposive (Clark, 1998 as cited in Whitehead, 2002 p.499). One of the participants was from one of the public schools in Butwal, Nepal and the other two were from two public schools in Bhairahawa, Rupandehi, Nepal. Since three of them have more than five years of experience in teaching the English language at the secondary level, they were selected for this study.

After informing the objectives and confidential nature of the study, all the participants provided their verbal consent to take part in this study. After the consent, I arranged a time for interviews and took in-depth interviews from both of the participants in two different phases. In the first phase, all of the participants were interviewed and their interviews were audio-recorded taking their permission. I used the open-question „funnel“ technique while taking interviews. The „funnel“ technique of interview which was described by Cohen and Manion (1989), starts the interview process with general non-threatening questions that are designed to place the interviewee at ease in the initial stages and after the interviewee appears to have relaxed, the focus of further questions becomes more specific and knowledge-intensive (Whitehead, 2002). After transcribing the recorded interviews, I realized that some important points related to the experience of participants which were crucial to this study

were missing. So, I arranged the next phase of interviews to include some more points related to the participants' experience. Then, I embedded the data gathered through the second phase in the interviews taken in the first phase.

The thematic analysis method was used to analyze data. This is a method for "identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Six phases of data analysis of thematic analysis as presented by Braun and Clarke (2006) were used to analyze the data and present the report of the themes. Accordingly, in the first phase, I transcribed all the interviews and became familiar with my data reading and re-reading them. Then, coding of data in a systematic fashion from both transcribes was done. In other words, I generated initial codes. After generating initial codes, I collated codes into potential three themes and their subthemes and gathered all data relevant to each potential theme and subthemes. Then, the themes were reviewed to make sure if the themes work. Finally, the themes were given names, and the report was produced.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

##### **Excessive Use of Mother Tongue in the Classroom**

Three secondary level English teachers who had been teaching in secondary level students in public schools of Rupandehi districts were taken interviews. After taking the interviews it was identified that the difficulty that they had been facing while teaching English to secondary level learners was excessive use of mother tongue in the classroom. One of the participants of the study Pradip (pseudonym) recalled : Students use their mother tongue i.e. Nepali language excessively in the classroom which has caused difficulty in teaching. They ask teachers to translate each and everything in Nepali language. Unless and until teacher translate the text from English to Nepali they don't think they had been taught [Pradip, 03 May 2022].

Many students of public schools of Nepal tend to use Nepali language while learning English. They don't want the class with English instruction only. This is the case of most of the public schools of Nepal which has minimized the time of English exposure for the learners. Using the L1 while teaching English has been hindrance of English learning.

On this regard , next participant of the study Susant (pseudonym) responded; To create the English speaking environment in the school has been difficult. Students' English is very poor and they have been habituated to learn English through translation technique. If we teach only through English they get puzzled and they don't respond at all [Sushant, 03 May 2022].

This experience of the teacher suggests that the learners are taught through Nepali in public schools. This practice has been continued from very junior level. Students can't understand the teachers' voice. They don't respond in the classroom. Students seem to hesitate in the classroom.

Likewise, the third participant of the study Gyanu (pseudonym) shared her experience like this: Students have been learning English by using their mother tongue from very beginning. Hence, it has been very difficult for us to run English medium classes only. They don't understand. Once when I taught poetry in English to the students of grade 10. One of the students from the class told to his classmate, 'today our English teacher didn't teach us anything' [Gyanu, 03 May 2022].

Many studies exist which found evidence of negative influence of L1; therefore they insist on use of only target language for teaching L2. They found the overuse of L1 reduced the learners' exposure to the target language input (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). According to Lightbown and Spada (1999) the patterns transferred from the L1 are definitely the fundamental sources of errors in the L2 learning. Similarly emphasis on the 'comprehensible input' and 'meaning' by Krashan and Terrel (1983) also demands the maximum exposure to get target language in L2 classes.

### **Poorly Resourced English Classroom**

The classrooms of Nepal are found poorly resourced. As English class needs so many resources to handle the classroom such as Newspaper, English Journals, Tape, Video and ICT- friendly climate. But it is pity to say that there are not such tools need for English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms. Teachers are depending only on the course-books for their teaching. On this regard, one of the participants of the study Pradip pseudonym stated: Our school does not have ICT supported climate. We are teaching English by using text-books only. There are not English newspapers and English magazine either. There is not even the good library for the students to support their reading comprehension. This is the reason why students are weak in English subjects [Pradip, 03 May 2022].

Resourceful classroom with teaching aids makes classroom lively, meaningful, creates charm in language learning, reduces the lectures and explanations, minimizes teacher's fatigue, meaningful exposure. However, our many of the public schools of Nepal are not ICT friendly and resourceful. Regarding this another participant of the study Susant pseudonym expressed his view like this: I have been teaching English for six years here. But the situation has not been changed since we didn't have digital tools for teaching English. As we were told that we need to use ICT tools and innovative ways of teaching English in training. But our school and

classroom are not supportive to this view. There is not other materials than text-book in the school. . [Sushant, 03 May 2022]

Secondary level curriculum of Nepal is based on Communicative Language Teaching and Task-based Language Teaching. It demands the use of varieties of materials and digital tools and ICTs. In spite of knowing that there are not sufficient materials in school to use for ELT. Many students are asked to read the textbooks and teachers are also following text-book teaching convention. In line of this reference, the third participant of this study Gyanu pseudonym recalled her days of teaching : Honestly speaking we know everything and doing nothing. This is because of the environment of the public school of Nepal. There is not language-lab in the school. There is not ICT supported tools like projector in the classroom which has forced us to use textbook only. We have talked about this to administration but they are only busy to build new buildings rather than listening our proposal. I personally sometimes use my laptop and smart phone as a tool to support the students' learning. However, this has not been sufficient [Gyanu, 03 May 2022].

Resourceful class motivate the learners to learn since they make the classroom environment interactive. Teaching aids are an integral component in any language classroom. The many benefits of teaching aids include helping learners improve reading comprehension skills, illustrating or reinforcing a skill or concept, differentiating instruction and relieving anxiety or boredom by presenting information in a new and exciting way. Resourced classroom also engages students' other senses since there are no limits in what aids can be utilized when supplementing a lesson.

### **Insufficient Teaching Time**

Language teaching and learning is not an easy deed indeed.. It takes long time. Many English teachers claim that 45 minutes classroom time which has been allocated for ELT is not sufficient for them. Since English is a foreign language in Nepal and it is never easy to learnt within classroom premises. The curriculum demands for communicative activities and students-centered teaching method. However, in 45 minutes it is impossible to participate all the students in communicative activities. In the line with this reference, one of the participants of the study Pradip pseudonym stated his view:

There are so many communicative and task-based activities given in the book. However, owing to the lack of time I am unable to involve the learners in those communicative activities. The curriculum treats the learners as they learn many things in junior classes. But it is pity I should begin the lesson as they know nothing. . [Pradip, 03 May 2022]

Teaching L1 and L2 is different. For teaching the mother tongue the 45 minutes classroom time could be sufficient, since many of the things in the textbook and curriculum can be self studied by the learners. But in the case of L2 i.e. English in our case 45 minutes will never be sufficient. Since each and everything in the course should be elaborated and facilitated by the teachers. This is the reason why students are feeling difficulty in learning English. In this reference, another participant of the study Sushant pseudonym stated;

*The time for teaching English is not sufficient. At least one extra period for English should be managed. Students study other subjects in Nepali in public school and they solely study English in 45 minutes per-day. Neither they listen English in other periods nor get exposure at home. This has created difficult atmosphere for learning English in public school of Nepal.*  
 . [Sushant, 03 May 2022]

If there is greater exposure of second language the learning will be better. Krashen (1987) focuses on the comprehensive input. He also focuses on that the input should be greater for better learning. Wong (2005) suggests that the input flood can be made more effective if students are required to respond to the input through associated activities such as taking a quiz, answering questions about the flooded input. For the greater exposure we need more time for teaching.

## **5. Conclusion**

Through this study I came to the conclusion that there are a number of intermingled factors that are detrimental to low performance of public school students in English. The over-use of students' mother tongue in English classes. The lack of teaching materials and resources in English classes. The teachers following textbook reading culture. The lack of time for practicing communicative activities in language classroom are the major hindering factors for English. To improve the poor condition of English in public schools of Nepal, there should be English environment in school. For this every English teacher should teach English through English and students should be encouraged to use English outside and inside the classroom. The school administration should manage the ELT materials for teaching English language. The teachers should use authentic materials and ICTs in English classroom. The principle should help English teachers for making ICT friendly environment in school. The school must manage the extra time for English subject. Only 45 minutes can't be enough for learning foreign language.

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