Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences on Student Engagement in Nepali Secondary EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

Pedagogy in English as foreign language situations has undergone a significant shift at present, and receiving an increased attention of educators and scholars from worldwide that teaching strategies should ensure the involvement of students in learning activities. This qualitative research study aims to explore the perceptions and experiences of teachers on student engagement in secondary level EFL classrooms. Four English language teachers as research participants were purposively selected from public secondary schools of Kanchanpur district, Nepal. I employed narrative inquiry as a research method in which in-depth interview protocols were used as research tools to obtain the information. The findings of the study showed that English teachers at secondary level make efforts to employ student-focused teaching methods to promote student engagement in learning activities. The study also revealed that English teachers utilize student-centred techniques like group and pair work, conversation, project works, presentations, role-playing, spelling and quiz contests, etc., to engage students in learning. The study further revealed student motivation as crucial element of teaching that teachers employ promoting students' learning through their active involvement. Likewise, this study revealed students' poor base of English as the primary challenge, and other challenges like lack of infrastructural facility and ICT facilitated classes for language teaching-learning. The findings suggest that English teachers need to devise

their teaching plans to improve students' basic knowledge in English. They have to develop students' confidence level providing extensive exposure to English so that they feel comfortable involving in learning activities.

Keywords: Qualitative, narrative, student-centred, motivation, challenges

Introduction

Engaging students in teaching-learning activities is an essential classroom teaching strategy that teachers employ to make successful teaching and learning with active participation of students in the classroom. Learning engagement is students' active involvement during teaching-learning process in the classroom. It refers to the time amount invested and type of learners' participation in class activities. Fredricks et al. (2004, as cited in Barus et al., 2022) define student engagement as the active participation of the students in obeying rules, eagerly doing something, concentrating, trying and paying attention in the teaching and learning process (p. 241). In the context of Nepalese English classrooms, it is one of the most significant challenges for teachers to address and improve students' communication abilities. Students must engage in learning activities if they are to become proficient in language skills. Their active participation in learning activities determines the overall learning performance in the classroom. In countries where English is taught and learned as a foreign language, many students struggle with language acquisition which makes them less motivated and inactive in participating in learning activities. This problem is mostly found in secondary level classrooms where students are expected to learn grammar rules, vocabularies and communicative skills. However, teaching methods and techniques in many Nepalese English classrooms are still teacher-centered like translation, rote learning, memorization, repetition, rather than practicing active, student-focused and communication based activities (Bista, 2020). According to Bhandari (2020), many Nepalese English teachers still employ traditional mode of teaching. They use solely the textbook and grammar translation method and lecture-based teaching methods in which students do not get opportunities for actively participating in communicative activities (p. 10). The traditional teacher-centred approaches of teaching restrict students' active engagement in learning activities in the classrooms and make them disconnect from learning language for real-world use. This, in this sense, not only confines students' involvement in interactive activities but also fails to develop communication skills upon students.

In addition, the diverse socio-cultural landscape of Nepalese societies marked by various ethnic groups and languages further makes the English learning more complicated. The exposure to English in Nepalese EFL classrooms is quite limited; students often view English language as distant and irrelevant, which further leads them to having a lack of eagerness to learning English (Poudel, 2019). Furthermore, the lack

of proper infrastructural facility, large class size, limited access to ICT, digital tools and resources hamper creating engaging learning atmosphere in the classrooms. Subedi (2020), in this vein, asserts that large classrooms, particularly in remote places, cause problems to implement interactive teaching approaches in the classrooms so that students remain passive and less engaged in the classroom (p. 35). Furthermore, the textbook-dependence and exam-oriented teaching leaves little room for developing creativity upon students and implementing student-centered teaching approaches in the classroom. As teachers' common understanding of teaching is teaching of prescribed textbooks, they often follow the texts and exercises given in the book while teaching, and on the basis, they measure students' learning achievements. Sapkota (2015), in this context, states, a common understanding of teaching English in Nepalese context implies teaching the prescribed textbook lessons and learning means following the teachers' instructions (p. 71). Teachers sometimes make efforts to create interaction in the classroom but often in dominated and controlled form with short textual questions (Tiwari, 2021).

Moreover, in Nepal, English teachers often struggle to keep students' interest towards English because of lack of exposure to real use of English outside the classroom. This creates difficulty for students to realize and understand practical value of learning English for real contexts (Poudel, 2019). As a result, there is found mismatch between classroom teaching and real-world use of language. In Nepal, secondary level English teachers feel students' engagement as essentially associated to educational achievements that are measurable such as good result in exams. Bista (2020), in this context, states that teachers define classroom engagement in the sense of students' involvement during teaching learning activities in the class, doing assignments rather than behavioral engagement in learning (p. 52). Teachers mostly disregard the importance of promoting intrinsic motivation or feeling of involvement in the learning process instead they relate student engagement with students' time invested in accomplishing given tasks. This limited understanding of teachers on students' engagement may restrict them from employing more innovative, student-centered and communicative type of teaching approaches in the classroom.

Regarding student engagement in classroom learning activities, despite many struggles language teachers face, recent pedagogy utilizes student-centered innovative teaching methods to promote students' participation in teaching learning process. There have many innovative teaching methods been employed in teaching language. Communicative language teaching, task-based language teaching, content and language integrated learning, cooperative language learning, etc. are innovative methods of language teaching at recent. Task based language teaching (TBLT) is one of the innovative, relevant and interactive teaching methods for engaging students in learning activities in the classroom. According to Shrestha (2021), TBLT method

encourages students to engage in real-world tasks like role-playing, problem-solving, debates, etc. which motivates students and promotes interaction in the classroom (p. 106). It focuses on communication skills and contextual language use going beyond the traditional practice of language learning of drill and memorization. It makes students realization of learning English for real life contexts. Similarly, student-centered teaching approaches prioritize active learning, critical thinking and inquiry-based approaches. Recent pedagogical frameworks such as problem-based learning, flipped classroom, and project-based learning are gaining attraction as educators recognize the importance of fostering students' autonomy, creativity and problem-solving skills (Chandraja et al, 2024). Regarding student engagement in the classroom teaching learning process, use of technology can be a crucial strategy to promote students' involvement in learning activities. Adhikari (2021) states, today's language teachers need to learn how to take advantage of the technology and how to integrate it into their teaching skills to make their teaching and learning activities more interactive and meaningful (p. 108). Language teachers, in this sense, must update themselves with new innovations in the field of technology and have to be able to bring those innovations into their classrooms. In the same vein, Poudel (2019) says, incorporating multimedia tools, educational apps, videos, online resources make the lesson more interactive and engaging for students (p. 72). Students and teachers who have access to technology especially in urban areas are taking its benefit but it is very limited in remote/rural areas schools because of lack of infrastructural facility and internet problem (Subedi, 2020).

To promote student engagement in the classroom, interaction among students and teacher-student interaction is necessary. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of language learning suggests social interaction, collaborative learning and guided participation as key insights to enhance student engagement in language classroom. He says, "What the child is able to do in collaboration today, he will be able to do independently tomorrow" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87). This statement supports the idea of scaffolding and working within the zone of proximal development to promote student engagement. It means, teachers role is quite crucial that they need to create conducive learning atmosphere in the classroom for active participation of students in learning activities as Chandraja et al. (2024) state, positive teacher behaviors have the potential to cultivate student engagement (p. 68). In this context, Gan (2021) states that intimacy/closeness between a teacher and students, simplicity and sense of humor of a teacher, creating opportunities for asking questions and solving problems in the classroom further create an environment for effective communication between a teacher and students in the classroom. (p. 3). Similarly, Barus et al. (2022) say, the interaction between teacher and students largely determines a positive classroom environment, when teachers and students have good interactions, a good or conducive classroom environment will be created which will

lead to effective learning (p. 240). Likewise, Richards (1988) states, frequent interaction between teachers and students are greatly needed, therefore, teachers, both as organizers and participants of classroom activities are believed to be a key factor for language learning (as cited in Leu et al., 2023, p. 2621). In this sense, teachers who can create conducive and interactive learning atmosphere in the classroom and who provide constructive feedback to their students during participation, they can engage their students in the learning activities.

Based on the methodology of teaching and the specific learning activities teachers create in the classroom, students get engaged in learning. To foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment in the classroom that promotes students' meaningful participation and improves their learning, teachers can employ a variety of engaging activities, such as group and pair works, projects, presentations, debates, discussions, dialogues, conversations, role-playing, and more. Thus, teachers need to design new strategies and develop effective pedagogical practices to boost the learning process and achieve the intended results (Barrios and Guzman, 2020, p. 13). In addition, to enhance student engagement in learning, many teaching & learning strategies can be adopted and employed during teaching. The application of innovative teaching methods and techniques like task-based learning, problem solving, project-based learning, inclusive teaching and /or differentiated instruction, etc. promote student engagement in the classroom activities. Likewise, use and accessibility of technology and digital tools, student encouragement and motivation, collaborative learning and interaction also support creating student engaging learning environment in the classrooms. As there is growing importance of communicative English language skills with its globalized need, it is crucial for English language teachers to adopt more dynamic, interactive, engaging and need based pedagogical strategies that could create student engaging learning atmosphere in the classrooms. As discussed in the above mentioned paragraphs, Nepalese EFL teachers lack employing student engaging teaching strategies in their classroom teachings or make the use of engaging activities in a very limited and dominant form, I feel it a pertinent issue to be explored that how Nepalese English language teachers perceive and experience students' participation in their classroom practices. Therefore, this study aims to explore perceptions and experiences of English language teachers regarding student engagement in their classrooms.

Methods and Procedures

This is a qualitative narrative study based on primary information. To explore the perceptions and experiences on student engagement in Nepali secondary level EFL classrooms, I selected four secondary level English teachers from four schools of Kanchanpur district who have been teaching in the same level for more than ten years.

I selected Kanchanpur district, Nepal as research site and four public secondary schools from different locations on the basis of convenience in data collection process as I belong to the same district. I employed purposive sampling of participants on my judgment keeping in mind the purpose my study. Similarly, I selected two male and two female participants to maintain gender equality and to get representative data so that obtained data could be more valid and trustworthy. For the collection of data, I developed a flexible, informal, in -depth narrative interview protocols.

During the data collection process, I first made contact with research participants from telephone, taking the approval; I met them in person and informed them about my research plan. I made a rapport with them. After their consent of becoming the part of my study, I took their interview. I took the interviews multiple times to gather rich, in-depth and authentic stories. I recorded their voices in my device in audio form taking their permission for recording. The interviews I took were conducted in Nepali language because of their comfort of sharing their perceptions and experiences in Nepali language freely. Later, I transcribed audios into printed form, and translated those transcriptions into English language. As translation was once completed, I went through those translations several times and created stories of each participant based on the interviews. On the basis of my research purpose, I arranged the stories into different related themes. Finally, the analysis and interpretation of themes I made on the basis of thematic analysis developed by Brawn and Clarke (2006): familiarizing the data, coding, generating themes, naming themes and writing up aligning with the purpose of the study of exploring teachers' perceptions and experiences of student engagement in secondary English classrooms. Moreover, to maintain ethical standards, I assigned pseudonyms to the research participants, and followed all the necessary ethical and quality standards during every step of my study from data collection process to interpretation and up to writing up.

Results and Discussion

Data collected employing narrative in-depth interviews were analyzed and interpreted under the following main themes.

Teachers' Perceptions of Student Engagement

To promote students' active engagement and learning, teachers need to create a variety of learning opportunities for students in the classroom. According to Warayet (2011) a teacher is the director of the activities, playing the crucial role in providing students with opportunities for participation in the classroom (p. 16). Similarly, Hollander (2002) asserts participation as collective responsibility of the class which facilitates students' learning. Likewise, Bean and Peterson (1998) state, participatory class employs whole-class discussion and collaborative learning (p. 34). In this sense, students' participation and learning can be promoted through their active involvement in classroom

teaching learning activities. In this context, my research participants Dipesh stated that, *Engaging students with one another in the classroom can be a better strategy of engaging them in learning activities.* He further said,

> *Students become more open in sharing their views with their friends rather than to the teacher directly. So, we have to make pairs and groups of students according to their interest and the need of the class.*

Dipesh's perception of student engagement clearly conveyed that collaborative and cooperative learning environment in the classroom provides students more opportunities to participate in learning activities as Donato (2016) asserts "great importance ought to be given to learning through cooperative and collaborative practices" (cited in Badjadi, 2020, p. 9). His story also showed that students feel more comfortable and willing to express their ideas with their peers. In the very context, Kapil stated that,

> *For effective teaching learning in the classroom students' participation is a must. To participate them in learning activities, I think, we need to find out their real problems and weaknesses, and have to help them even through remedial teaching.*

Kapil's story indicates that teachers need to know the real learning-related problems of their students before they start their teaching. They also have to take into consideration the ways their students become ready to participate in class activities. His story also indicates that teachers need to adapt their teaching strategies in real time to address areas where students require more assistance. In the same vein, he further opined,

> *I think, if they don't afraid of the teacher in the classroom, they take part in learning activities. I, becoming their friend-like, not an authoritarian, motivate them to take part in teaching learning activities.*

This opinion of Kapil showed that ensuring students' learning and participation in learning activities, teachers must be able to avoid their fear and reluctance that impede their progress in learning. It also demonstrated that authoritative behavior of the teacher is ineffective in encouraging students to learn and engage in classroom activities.

Regarding student engagement in teaching learning activities, Divya believes that, *to engage students in classroom activities, we have to bring innovative ideas and materials into the classroom.* For which, she said,

> *If we bring technology in the classroom like smart board, audiovisual devices, use of mobile phone connecting to internet, etc., we can better implement student centered methods and techniques and promote student engagement. I feel that use of technology brings innovations in the classroom and students get inspiration to involve in teaching learning activities and learning becomes better.*

The aforementioned sharing of Divya demonstrated that teachers can promote their students engagement in classroom activities by incorporating innovative ideas in their teaching style**.** Her narrative also showed that integrating technology into the classroom is

essential for inspiring students to participate actively. In the same vein, another research participant Bipasha stated,

> *In my view teachers sometimes need to make the requirements that every student must participate in learning activities. When they participate, they get the opportunity to learn from others who are willing and able to engage in learning activities. While forming groups for project work and other assignments, we teachers must include good and poor students in a group because in my belief good students teach and support poor students.*

Her experience demonstrated that teachers need to devise their teaching strategies keeping in the mind the students' involvement in classroom activities that they have to be inspired to take part in. Additionally, her story also demonstrated the need of collaborative learning, and emphasized more on learning from peers as Vygotsky (1978) states "a teacher or more experienced peer is able to provide the learner with 'scaffolding' to support the student's evolving understanding of knowledge domains or development of complex skills" (p. 85). From this, it can be said that teachers need to create supportive learning atmosphere for enhancing students' engagement through collaboration among students in the classroom activities. In line with the same, Bhatt (2025) also states that English language teachers have to create more English-learning activities in the classroom to keep the students motivated and engaged in learning so that they get more learning and practicing opportunities (p. 168). The perceptions of each of my research participants, in this regard, shows that they have been employing student engaging and student focused teaching learning activities in their classrooms.

Innovative Classroom Practices to Promote Student Engagement

As student centered teaching techniques seek to address the needs of the students, increase their understanding, and encourage them becoming independent learner (Badjadi, 2020), teachers need to devise such activities in their classroom teachings which address students' needs and enrich their learning through participation. Similarly, in terms of strengthening the utilization of student centered teaching strategies and increasing students' involvement in teaching learning activities, Dipesh shared his experience, and said,

> *According to the teaching topic and classroom situation, I make my students engaged in different activities. For example, if I am teaching speaking skill or language functions, I use dialogue, conversation, role play, etc. Similarly, when I teach grammar or vocabulary, I ask them to find out rules and meanings from the context and given examples. While teaching passage, they are involved in reading activity; loud reading, silent reading. They read aloud and learn reading skills and pronunciation at once. Similarly, they are taught listening skill using audiovisual*

materials that they learn to listen and understand.

This experienced story provided by Dipesh clearly demonstrated the way he exploits teaching activities for engaging students in learning in his classroom teaching in accordance with the teaching topic and classroom circumstances. Further, his story highlighted the use of digital resources in teaching for promoting students' learning. In similar vein, Kapil narrated about the adoption of classroom activities for students' engagement in teaching learning. He said,

> *The techniques I mostly use in the classroom to engage my students in learning activities are pair work, group work, elicitation, role play, conversation, dialogue, drill, problem solving, project work, presentation, etc. which mostly focus on students' active engagement and learning.*

This narration of Kapil revealed that student centered teaching activities emphasize students' active involvement providing sufficient learning opportunities in the classroom. It also indicated that such activities enable students' learning the subject matter more quickly, effectively and independently. Divya, in this context, posited her experience that,

> *In my class, I, sometimes, take audio visual devices and materials, English speaking people's speech, conversation, English songs, movies, etc. for teaching listening and speaking. Similarly, while teaching vocabulary, I teach them through games like spelling contest, quiz contest, etc. In the same way, while teaching the use of prepositions like in, on, at, over, under, besides, etc., I make students move in the class and do the activity. In some classes, I ask my students to play the role of different people like political leader, Judge, lawyer, policeman, doctor, nurse, etc so that they know about their duties and responsibilities, and learn to present in front of the class.*

Here, Divya's experience revealed that teachers need to integrate technology in their teaching strategy to better implement student centered teaching techniques, and increase students' involvement in learning activities. Her story also shows that she is employing innovative strategies to attract the attention of the students towards learning through participation. This indicates that such innovative ideas in the classroom ensure students' participation in learning activities. Regarding the utilization of learner centered teaching activities for student engagement in the classroom; Bipasha shared her experience, and said,

> *I mostly use student centered teaching techniques like role play, pair work, group work, dialogue, elicitation, demonstration, conversation, project work, presentation, etc. I attempt to maximize the learning opportunities for students' active participation in the classroom and provide them equal opportunity to take part in each and every learning activity.*

Bipasha's narrative apparently displayed that she made use of student centered

teaching activities in her classroom. Her narrative also indicated that classroom teaching needs to be made student focused providing them maximum learning opportunities in the classroom which optimizes their better learning. In this way, the narratives of all the research participants regarding student engagement in the classroom teaching activities, demonstrated that they devise their classroom pedagogy utilizing student-focused activities like group work, pair work, conversation, project work, presentation, role play, spelling contest, quiz contest, etc. They were found having extremely positive attitudes, sincere concerns, and comprehensive knowledge regarding promoting student engagement in learning activities utilizing student-focused teaching strategies in their classroom teachings.

Teacher Motivation and Feedback for Student Engagement

The motivation of teachers is an essential factor in creating an effective conducive teaching learning atmosphere in the classroom. To create an effective learning atmosphere, teachers need to promote students involvement in teaching learning activities through positive motivation and feedback. Teachers' strategies of making students active involvement in teaching learning activities makes their teaching effective and enriches students' learning. Regarding motivating students, Skinner and Belmont (1993) state, highly motivated students are usually actively and spontaneously involved in activities and find the process of learning enjoyable (p. 571). Similar to the context, Turner and Patrick (2004) state that, "teachers' instructional behaviors can contribute to the development of students' work habits by encouraging and supporting them to participate in classroom activities" (p. 1782). These statements also demonstrated that to promote students' engagement in teaching learning activities, teachers in their classroom teaching must take into consideration the motivation of students which is a crucial factor of teaching strategy. My research participant Bipasha, in this context, shared her experience and said,

> *I always focus my teaching keeping in the mind the poor students in the classroom who afraid of participating in teaching learning activities. I always encourage them to take part in activities through positive feedback.*

This narration of Bipasha indicated that teachers always need to provide motivation and encouraging feedback to the students, and also have to take into consideration the weak students in the classroom. Regarding student motivation in the classroom, she further stated,

> *I show friendly behavior with my students. I try to present myself in the class like a learner, their friend. If I do so they become a bit open and attempt to speak and participate in learning activities. Next thing what I do is, I very rarely scold and punish them in the class. I never de-motivate or dominate students in my class for*

their mistakes. I think constructive feedback promotes their learning.

Here, Bipasha's story demonstrated that teachers need to present themselves in the classroom as participants during conducting activities. Skinner and Belmont (1993) state that, "when teachers are less involved with students, students not only miss the involvement but also experience teachers as less consistent and more coercive" (p. 577). This means teachers' behavior in the classroom has a big impact on how students are inspired towards learning. Her also story indicated that teachers ought to behave democratically with students rather than in a repressive way. Her story further suggests that students' participation in learning activities can be increased when teachers' behavior is inspiring towards students.

Regarding promoting students' involvement in teaching learning activities, Kapil opined, *evoking interest and making students ready for learning is most important thing.* For which, he said, *we have to provide conducive environment of English language learning at school and home.* His opinion indicated that students' motivation is crucial for their involvement in learning activities which can be promoted through creating positive learning atmosphere inside and outside the class. Regarding enriching students' involvement in learning activities, Kapil further posited that,

> *I make rapport with my students individually, find out their problems, help them even outside class, convince and encourage them to take part in each and every activity done in the classroom. I always motivate them and give positive feedback for their performance.*

This narration of Kapil demonstrated that in order to enhance students' involvement in learning activities teachers need to be supportive and have to be able to address individually the students' learning needs. It also showed that teacher's compliments persuade and motivate students to participate in learning activities as Schurmann et al. (2020) state, students who are not motivated to learn might not live up to their potentials in academic achievement (p. 740). In this regard, Dipesh shared his experience and said,

> *To make students' active participation in teaching learning activities, I think, we have to to be able to provide them such environment in which they feel happy and eager to take part in. They have to be provided constructive feedback if they go wrong during participation*

This belief of Dipesh revealed that in order to maximize students' active engagement in teaching learning activities, teachers must be able to create comfortable and motivating learning atmosphere for their students as Turner and Patrick (2004) argue "students would be most willing to participate in classrooms where teachers express enthusiasm about learning, communicate a belief that all students can learn, and provide academic and emotional support for students' understanding" (p. 1764). Likewise, Divya, stated that,

> *For making effective classroom pedagogy, we have to motivate our students towards learning. To motivate them, we have to bring innovative ideas and materials, and practice them in the classroom. We can provide them small prizes in the classroom for their progress and achievements.*

Divya's this belief showed that new and innovative teaching styles, activities and/ or materials inspire students towards learning and draw their attention towards teaching learning in the classroom, and also motivate them to take part in learning activities conducted during teaching.

The aforementioned experiences of my research participants demonstrated that they employ different types of teaching strategies to motivate students towards learning and make efforts to promote their active engagement in teaching learning activities. Their narratives also clearly demonstrated the motivation of students as a crucial element for student engagement that teachers should incorporate into their teaching strategies in order to enhance student learning through active participation. In addition, as Schurmann et al. (2020) state, teachers who are well-prepared to motivate their students in various contexts might contribute to the solution of problems (p. 754), their narratives communicated that they have an extensive understanding and professional knowledge, and positive attitude of how to motivate students to participate in active, engaged learning.

Challenges of Student Engagement

There are several challenges Nepalese EFL teachers have been facing regarding student engagement in the classrooms. Students in public schools often take English as difficult subject feeling little practical value in daily lives. Because of this understanding, students become discouraged with English and show little enthusiasm in participating in activities which is very challenging for teachers to actively involve students in teaching learning activities in classrooms (Shrestha, 2021). Similarly, students' basic knowledge of English plays negative role in their active participation in class activities. Upadhyay (2024) states that, lack of content and vocabulary knowledge affect students' active participation (p. 147). According to Singh (2024), due to weak English language proficiency of students' teachers struggle employing effective teaching plans to promote students' language skills (p. 47). In this context, my research participant Bipasha said,

> *There are several problems to participate students in classroom activities. The poor basic knowledge of English is the main problem. Students lack the knowledge of necessary vocabulary, grammatical rules, proper pronunciation system, etc., which makes them hesitant from speaking and engaging in learning activities.*

This assertion of Bipasha demonstrated that students lack proper knowledge for interaction in the classroom. It also shows that teachers need to devise the plans that promote students basic knowledge in English. From the very beginning of their teaching

plan, teachers need to consider the students' level of previous learned knowledge, and accordingly they have to adopt the teaching strategies. In the similar context, Dipesh shared that,

> *Most of the students in the class feel hesitate to take part in activities. They sit behind the class and afraid of being asked. I think, and many times I observed also, they feel reluctant of being wrong, and their friends might laugh at them. Though, there are many other problems like infrastructural facility and facility of internet and digital tools for well equipped language learning classroom, but the main obstacle is students' poor base of English which discourages them from involving in learning activities.*

This statement of Dipesh clearly demonstrated that students' basic knowledge level of English in public secondary schools is quite poor because of which they are becoming poorer in English. In this situation, English language teachers have to make the plan of improving their basic knowledge. They need to be given extra, remedial and individual-like classes for the improvement so that they get encouraged to participate in teaching learning process. Dipesh's story also shows that public schools' classrooms are not well managed and facilitated for English language teaching and learning. Regarding the problems of engaging students in the classroom, Kapil shared his experience and said,

> *Students are not motivated to participate actively. Their limited knowledge and proficiency in English is the main problem which demotivate them for active participation. In my view, our English learning environment is not much favorable; means, classroom management, class size, number of students, etc. are not suitable for language learning. Therefore, students do not get enough exposure to English, and as a result, many of students have poor knowledge in English language.*

This shared experience of Kapil indicated that English language learning atmosphere is not conducive in our schools. Students are not exposed to English sufficiently. Conducive atmosphere indicates the lack of proper infrastructural facility and availability of ICT use. It also shows that English language teachers need to manage physical facility for learning language and pedagogical reformations for enhancing students' learning through engaging activities in the classrooms. Likewise, talking about problems of students' engagement in the classroom, Divya said that,

> *The performance of students in English is poor. They lack knowledge of grammar rules, vocabulary, etc. There is also unavailability of ICT facilitated classrooms and access of internet in the school for language learning. Similarly, we, teachers might have also problems of inadequate pedagogical skills and strategies because recent pedagogy has become advanced and innovative, and we lack updating because of which we may not have been employing strategies for better engaging students in learning activities.*

Here, Divya's story demonstrated that students lack proper competence and performance skills for participating English language learning activities. Her story also showed that teachers need capacity building trainings to update with recent innovations in pedagogy so that they could employ innovative teaching strategies to encourage and promote students participation in learning activities. In this way, all research participants shared experiences demonstrated as main challenge, the poor base of students in English which particularly hinder students' participation in learning activities. Similarly, their sharing also showed lack of infrastructural facility, lack of access of ICT tools and internet, large class size, lack of trainings for teachers, etc as challenges they have been encountered with which also hinder students' active learning and engagement in classrooms.

Conclusion

This research study aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of English language teachers on student engagement in Nepali secondary schools. It also attempted to investigate the challenges English teachers encounter in terms of engaging students in teaching learning activities in the classroom. The study found that secondary level English teachers have been implementing student-focused and student-engaging teaching activities in their classrooms. Their perception showed that to promote student engagement during class activities, teachers must provide an appropriate atmosphere for learning through collaboration and innovative strategies. Similarly, this study also revealed that English teachers employ student-focused activities like as group and pair work, conversation, project work, presentations, role-playing, spelling and quiz contests, and more to enhance students' engagement in the classroom. They were found to have incredibly positive attitudes, sincere concerns and comprehensive knowledge regarding how they integrate student-focused teaching strategies in their classrooms to encourage students' participation in learning activities. Similarly, this study found student motivation as a crucial element of teaching that teachers been employing during teaching to improve students' learning through active involvement. Their perceptions communicated their professional experience, broad comprehension and positive outlook on how to inspire students to involve in active, engaged learning. The study further revealed students' poor base of English as the primary challenge to engage students in active learning which is exacerbated by a number of other issues such as improper seating arrangements, limited internet connection, and a lack of digital tools and language learning devices.

As this study explored the positive and comprehensive perceptions, experiences and student-focused practices of research participants of student engaging in learning activities in their classrooms, it suggests English language teachers to make the plans for improving students' basic knowledge level of English. Teachers need to develop

confidence level upon students providing them more exposure to English for the practice so that they feel comfortable to take part in learning activities. This study also suggests language teachers and other concerned authorities for creating conducive atmosphere for language by providing physical facilities, language learning devices and ICT facility which encourages students to be engaged in learning. This is a small-scale research study limited to four English language teachers of public secondary schools of Kanchanpur district, Far western region of Nepal. It employed only interview protocols with open-ended questions for the collection of data. The findings could have been varied if validated with class observation. Therefore, the findings of the study may not be applicable for all the situations across the country. However, the study can be insightful and beneficial for the teachers teaching English at secondary level. It can equally be insightful for the scholars and researchers who wish to work further in the concerned area.

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