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Teaching Speaking Skills at the Secondary Level: Challenges and Classroom Practices in Rural Nepal

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Abstract

This qualitative descriptive study examines the challenges secondary level English teachers face in teaching speaking skills, and the classroom practices they use in response, in Tribeni Rural Municipality, Rukum West, Nepal. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five secondary-level English teachers from community schools, conducted in Nepali by telephone/internet and audio-recorded with participants' consent, and supplemented by interviewer field notes. Three themes were developed. Classroom-level challenges included large class sizes, limited exposure to English outside the classroom, examination-oriented instruction, students' fear of making mistakes, and inadequate instructional resources. Teacher- and institutional-level challenges included administrative workload that reduced lesson-planning time, teachers' own uncertainty about their spoken English, tension between curricular expectations for communicative competence and classroom realities, limited access to professional development, and limited collaboration among teachers. Despite these constraints, participants described adapting their practice through pair work, group discussion, questioning, role-play and other communicative tasks, and supportive feedback strategies broadly consistent with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching, even though full CLT implementation was constrained by the rural context. The findings suggest that classroom,

teacher, and institutional constraints interact rather than operate independently, and that teachers' adaptive strategies represent low-resource responses to a communicatively oriented curriculum operating under examination-driven, resource-scarce conditions. Because the study draws on five teachers in one rural municipality, the findings are context-specific rather than statistically generalizable; they may nonetheless inform teacher professional development, resource provision, and curriculum-assessment alignment in similarly under-resourced rural settings.

Keywords: speaking skills, English language teaching, Communicative Language Teaching

Introduction

English occupies a compulsory place in the Nepali school curriculum from the basic to the secondary level, and among the four language skills- listening, speaking, reading, and writing-speaking is widely regarded as the most immediately visible measure of communicative competence (Harmer, 2007; Richards, 2015). Speaking allows learners to express ideas, negotiate meaning, and participate in social and academic life in ways that reading and writing alone cannot. For learners in non-native contexts such as Nepal, oral proficiency is also tied to further education and employment prospects, since English functions as the medium of instruction in much of higher education and is frequently listed among the skills employers expect of graduates (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Within English language teaching, speaking is theorized not as a discrete skill to be drilled but as an interactive, meaning-focused activity best developed through communicative tasks that require learners to use language purposefully (Nunan, 1995; Thornbury, 2007). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which foregrounds interaction, negotiation of meaning, and learner participation, has become the dominant paradigm informing how speaking is meant to be taught in many EFL/ESL curricula, including Nepal's (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Yet the translation of communicative principles into classroom practice depends heavily on conditions class size, time, materials, teacher confidence, that vary widely across settings (Richards, 2015).

In Nepal, English is compulsory from the basic level onward, and the national curriculum explicitly identifies communicative competence, including speaking, as a learning goal (Curriculum Development Center, 2007, 2009). In practice, however, most English classrooms in Nepal remain teacher centered and examination-oriented: students are primarily concerned with

passing written examinations rather than developing the ability to communicate orally (Khaniya, 2005). This orientation shapes classroom practice before any question of resources or teacher proficiency arises, because activities that do not visibly prepare students for examinations tend to be treated as optional.

These pressures are compounded in rural schools. Limited resources, fewer opportunities for teachers to build language proficiency and pedagogical skill, and broader socio-economic constraints combine to make the development of speaking skills especially difficult outside urban centers (Riddell, 2001). Rural students typically have little contact with English outside the classroom, so the classroom is effectively the only place where oral English is practiced — and even there, large classes, textbook dependence, and a shortage of audio-visual and multimedia materials restrict how much speaking practice is realistically possible (Dakowska, 2005; Ur, 2002). Teachers in these settings also tend to have fewer opportunities for continuing professional development, which can leave them reliant on the methods they were trained in rather than on current communicative approaches (Bull, 2008; Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

Nepal focused research corroborates several of these patterns without yet explaining how they combine. Sharma (2020) links large class sizes and limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom to weaker speaking outcomes among students in Nepal; other Nepal-based accounts, drawn on later in this manuscript, describe how students' fear of making mistakes constrains oral participation and how some teachers report low confidence in their own spoken English. Individually, these studies identify important barriers class size, exposure, examination pressure, teacher confidence but each tends to isolate a single factor rather than examining how classroom-level, teacher-level, and institutional constraints interact within one setting, or how teachers actually respond to that combination of constraints in day-to-day practice.

This leaves a gap that is more than an evidence shortfall. What is missing is not simply more studies of individual barriers to speaking instruction in Nepal, but an account of how classroom, teacher, and institutional constraints operate together in a specific rural setting, and how teachers adapt their classroom practice under that combination of constraints. Addressing this gap requires examining a single, bounded rural context in enough depth to see these relationships, rather than surveying isolated barriers across many settings.

This study addresses that gap by examining the challenges secondary level English teachers face in teaching speaking skills, and the classroom practices they use to respond to those challenges, among five teachers in community schools in Tribeni Rural Municipality, Rukum West, Nepal. By focusing on one rural context in depth, the study aims to show how constraints identified separately in prior research interact in practice, and what this means for teachers' classroom decisions. Two research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What challenges do English teachers experience in teaching speaking skills at the secondary level in this rural context?

RQ2: How do teachers' classroom practices contribute to developing students' speaking skills under these constraints?

Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

Speaking is central to foreign and second language learning because it is through spoken interaction that learners exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, and receive the kind of real-time feedback that written practice cannot provide (Harmer, 2007). Richards (2015) argues that effective speaking instruction depends on genuine interaction and communicative activity rather than repetition or recitation. Despite this consensus, speaking remains underdeveloped in many rural schools, for reasons the literature attributes to teachers, institutions, and context rather than to any single cause.

The first recurring explanation concerns teachers' own language proficiency. Weak teacher language skills are repeatedly linked to lower-quality speaking instruction (Brown, 2001; McKay, 2006; Richards & Rodgers, 2014), and rural teachers in particular are reported to lack confidence in pronunciation, fluency, and spontaneous communication (Harmer, 2007; Juhana, 2012). Thornbury (2007) frames this as a modeling problem: because a teacher is often the only fluent English speaker a rural student regularly encounters, the teacher's own hesitancy limits what students can be shown, not only what they are told. Nunan (1995) makes a related point — that teachers' proficiency effectively sets the ceiling on the speaking practice available to learners, which implies that low teacher confidence does not simply coexist with weak student speaking outcomes but constrains them directly, for instance by pushing teachers toward grammar and writing instruction that feels safer to deliver (Luoma, 2004).

This pattern connects to a second theme: access to professional development. Kumaravadivelu (2006) argues that sustained pedagogical development is necessary for teachers to build the communicative competence they are expected to foster in students; without it, teachers tend to default to the traditional methods in which they were trained (Goh, 2007). Rural teachers, however, face practical barriers to attending training and workshops (Bull, 2008), and in the Nepali context this is compounded by a shortage of qualified trainers and limited modeling of communicative approaches (Borg, 2003). The literature is consistent on this point across contexts, though it says less about how the resulting proficiency and confidence gaps play out day to day in a specific rural classroom — a gap the present study addresses directly.

A third theme concerns teaching methodology itself. Traditional methods built around memorization, translation, and teacher-dominated instruction remain common in rural schools (Anuradha et al., 2014), reinforcing grammar and reading at the expense of speaking practice (Patel & Jain, 2008; Zhang, 2009). Communicative Language Teaching is widely presented as the preferred alternative because it foregrounds interaction, collaboration, and learner participation in meaningful tasks (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The literature also documents, however, why CLT is difficult to implement in exactly the settings that need it most: large classes, examination-oriented curricula, and limited teacher training in interactive methods all work against it (Brown, 2003). This tension between CLT as the intended pedagogy and the conditions under which many rural teachers actually work, is central to how this study interprets its findings and is developed further below.

A fourth theme is infrastructure and instructional resources. Audio-visual media, language laboratories, and other technology can extend learners' exposure to spoken English beyond the teacher's own voice (Thornbury, 2007; Ur, 2002), but many rural Nepali schools lack reliable electricity, multimedia equipment, and current learning materials (Dakowska, 2005). Without varied listening input, teachers are left to rely on textbook-based instruction, which narrows the range of speaking practice they can offer (Riddell, 2001).

A fifth theme concerns the relationship between curricular intent and classroom practice. The Curriculum Development Center (2007, 2009) identifies speaking and listening as core components of English language learning, yet teachers report insufficient training to conduct communicative activities and, under time pressure, tend to substitute reading and writing tasks

that map more directly onto examinations (Gass, 2002; Harmer, 2007). This creates a structural mismatch: the curriculum specifies communicative goals while the assessment system rewards written performance, leaving teachers to reconcile the two largely on their own.

Nepal specific research corroborates several of these international patterns. Sharma (2020) reports that large class sizes and limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom are associated with weaker speaking outcomes among students in Nepal. As in the international literature, Nepal-focused studies to date have tended to examine these barriers individually rather than as an interacting set of constraints operating on a single group of teachers in one setting, which is the gap this study addresses.

Theoretical Framework: Communicative Language Teaching

This research study is interpreted through Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), an approach built on the premise that language is best learned through use through interaction, negotiation of meaning, and engagement in tasks that have a communicative purpose rather than a purely linguistic one (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Three principles of CLT are especially relevant here. First, learners develop speaking ability primarily through opportunities to communicate, not through explanation or repetition alone. Second, the teacher's role shifts from transmitter of grammatical knowledge to facilitator of interaction — organizing pair work, group discussion, and tasks that require students to use language for a purpose. Third, fluency and willingness to communicate are treated as legitimate goals in their own right, alongside accuracy, with implications for how teachers respond to learner error.

CLT is a useful lens for this study because the challenges and practices reported by participant's map directly onto these principles: large classes and examination pressure work against opportunities for communicative interaction, while participants' accounts of pair work, group discussion, questioning, and role-play describe attempts within considerable constraints to enact the kind of facilitation CLT calls for. At the same time, CLT was developed with resourced, moderate-sized classrooms in mind, and its principles do not by themselves specify how a teacher should implement communicative pedagogy in a large, under-resourced, examination-driven rural classroom. This study therefore distinguishes between CLT as an intended pedagogy what the curriculum and teacher training assume classrooms will look like and the contextually constrained reality in which Tribeni's teachers work, using this distinction

to interpret both the barriers reported in the Findings and the adaptive strategies teachers described. The framework is revisited in the Discussion to interpret why particular practices emerged as feasible adaptations rather than as full CLT implementation.

Taken together, the literature establishes that teacher proficiency, professional development, methodology, resources, and curriculum-assessment alignment each independently constrain speaking instruction, and that CLT is the pedagogy against which classroom practice is typically measured. What remains under examined internationally and within Nepal is how these constraints combine within a single rural context and how teachers navigate that combination in their actual classroom decisions. This study addresses that gap using in-depth, context-specific qualitative evidence from Tribeni Rural Municipality.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a qualitative descriptive design (Sandelowski, 2000, 2010) to examine the challenges secondary level English teachers face in teaching speaking skills, and the classroom practices they use in response, within a single rural Nepali setting. A qualitative descriptive design was chosen, rather than a more interpretive tradition such as phenomenology or a multi-source bounded case study, because the research questions called for staying close to participants' own accounts of their challenges and practices rather than for generating a deep interpretive account of lived meaning or for treating the municipality as a bounded case examined through multiple data sources (which would call for case study). This label also fits the evidence actually collected semi-structured interviews analyzed thematically more defensibly than labels such as ethnography or narrative inquiry, which imply forms of data (prolonged fieldwork, individual life-history narratives) that this study did not gather.

Research Setting

The study was conducted in Tribeni Rural Municipality, Rukum West District, Nepal, at community schools offering secondary-level English instruction. The setting is analytically relevant rather than incidental: Rukum West is a hill district with limited urban infrastructure, and Tribeni's community schools share the resource and connectivity constraints common to many rural Nepali municipalities characteristics the literature identifies as directly shaping the

feasibility of communicative speaking instruction (Dakowska, 2005; Riddell, 2001). Locating the study in this setting made it possible to examine how constraints identified separately in prior research class size, examination pressure, resource shortage, limited professional development operate together for teachers working under the same rural conditions.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were five secondary-level English teachers from community schools in Tribeni Rural Municipality, purposively selected as information-rich cases able to speak in depth to the study's research questions that is, teachers actively teaching English speaking skills in this rural setting for at least last 5 years in secondary level. Participants are identified as T1 through T5 to protect confidentiality. A sample of five was considered appropriate for a qualitative descriptive design, in which the goal is depth of understanding within a bounded group of practitioners rather than statistical representativeness; five information-rich interviews were sufficient to identify both recurring patterns and points of variation across participants.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with each of the five teachers, conducted in Nepali by in person audio-recorded with participants' consent of around one hour for each respondent. The interview format balanced a consistent core of questions about the challenges of teaching speaking skills with the flexibility to follow up on issues participants raised. Interviewer field notes supplemented the interviews, chiefly to record contextual information relevant to interpreting participants' responses.

Data Analysis

Interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of the transcripts; (2) generation of initial codes capturing the challenges and practices participants described; (3) collating codes into candidate themes; (4) reviewing candidate themes against the coded extracts and the full dataset; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the analytic account presented in the Findings section. This process moved from teachers' specific statements about individual difficulties and strategies toward broader patterns for example, statements about administrative duties, limited planning time, and reliance on the textbook were coded separately

before being grouped into the broader institutional-constraints theme reported below. Three themes were developed: classroom-level challenges, teacher- and institutional-level challenges, and adaptive classroom practices; the first two address the first research question and the third addresses the second.

Trustworthiness

Efforts to support the credibility and dependability of the analysis included maintaining a clear coding trail from raw transcript to code to theme, and returning repeatedly to participants' own wording retained in the Findings as direct quotations to check that themes remained grounded in what teachers actually said rather than in prior expectations. As is inherent to small-sample qualitative research, the findings reflect the specific accounts of five teachers in one rural municipality and are not intended to be statistically generalizable; their value lies instead in the depth and contextual detail they provide (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

Consent forms were distributed to the respondents for their interest in the study. Participation was voluntary, and teachers were audio-recorded with their consent. Confidentiality was protected by identifying participants only as T1–T5 rather than by name.

Findings

This section presents the results of the thematic analysis of interviews with five secondary-level English teachers (T1–T5) working in community schools in Tribeni Rural Municipality, Rukum West. Three themes were developed: classroom-level challenges to teaching speaking skills, teacher- and institutional-level challenges, and classroom practices teachers used to develop students' speaking skills. The first two themes address the first research question; the third addresses the second. Across the interviews, these challenges were not reported as isolated problems: participants' accounts suggest that examination pressure, large classes, and limited resources compound one another, reducing opportunities for spoken practice, and that teachers' adaptive strategies represent responses to this combination of constraints rather than to any single barrier.

Theme 1: Classroom-Level Challenges to Teaching Speaking Skills

Participants described several interrelated features of the immediate classroom environment as barriers to speaking instruction: large class size, limited exposure to English, examination-focused teaching, students' fear of making mistakes, and inadequate instructional materials. While each could be considered separately, the interviews suggest they compound one another in practice.

Large Class Size

Large class size was described as a central obstacle to developing students' speaking skills. With many students in one classroom, teachers found it difficult to offer each student sufficient opportunity to speak within regular class hours, and speaking — an activity that depends on repeated chances to use the language, receive feedback, and try again — is especially sensitive to this constraint.

“With many students in one classroom, it becomes hard to give each individual enough chances to speak and to give feedback to each individual separately.” (T3)

Large classes also complicated organizing and monitoring interactive activities such as pair work, group discussion, role-play, and individual presentation, which require a teacher to manage participation and provide support across the room simultaneously. Participants indicated that in overcrowded classrooms some students remained actively engaged while others stayed passive, a pattern especially common in rural community schools with limited space and materials. Beyond making classroom management harder, large class size was described as directly reducing the amount of speaking practice available to each student.

Limited Exposure to English Outside the Classroom

A second classroom-level challenge was the absence of an environment in which students could regularly hear or use English outside school. Because students had little occasion to use English beyond the classroom, the English lesson functioned as the only place where oral English practice occurred.

“Students do not generally communicate in English or any language other than Nepali outside the classroom, so they get very few chances to use English in real life.” (T1)

This was described as particularly significant in Tribeni Rural Municipality, where communicative use of English in students' broader social environment is limited. Even when students acquired vocabulary and grammar in class, participants suggested there was little opportunity to consolidate this knowledge into fluent speech, natural pronunciation, or conversational patterns. Limited exposure therefore placed additional weight on the classroom as the sole site for developing oral practice.

Examination-Oriented Teaching and Learning

A third challenge was the extent to which classroom activity was shaped by examinations rather than by communicative goals. Participants described greater emphasis on reading, writing, grammar, and textbook exercises that map directly onto examination content, at the expense of time for speaking practice.

“Teachers are compelled to teach the required course and prepare their students for written examinations, and there is not enough time in class for engaging in speaking activities such as conversations, role-playing, and group discussions.” (T4)

Although oral communication is recognized as an important part of language learning, speaking activities were described as secondary in this context because they carry little weight in formal examinations — illustrating a discrepancy between the communicative goals of English language teaching and the realities of classroom practice.

Students' Fear of Making Mistakes

A further challenge concerned students' hesitation and fear of making mistakes. Participants described students avoiding spoken English because they feared grammatical, pronunciation, or vocabulary errors.

“Most of the students hesitate to speak English as they are scared of making mistakes and being ridiculed by their peers even if they know what they want to say.” (T2)

This challenge appeared especially relevant for students with little prior speaking practice, whose confidence in constructing sentences and pronouncing words was low. Fear of peer reaction was described as preventing students from voicing thoughts they were otherwise able to formulate, reflecting an affective dimension of speaking instruction: because developing

speaking ability requires experimenting with language and tolerating error, a classroom climate that does not feel safe for mistakes was seen as directly limiting participation.

Inadequate Teaching-Learning Resources and Infrastructure

Resource limitations were described as a further constraint on speaking development. Participants reported inadequate access to audio-visual aids, multimedia technology, language laboratories, and other materials that could increase students' exposure to spoken English.

“There were no enough audio-visual and technical resources at the disposal of teachers in the process of teaching speaking skills, and therefore, teachers had to rely on texts and the few learning aids in class.” (T5)

Without such resources, teachers relied more heavily on textbooks and classroom-based instruction, which, while providing useful language material, do not expose learners to the varied voices, accents, and conversational patterns that audio and video materials can offer. Resource limitations were thus linked to the broader problem of limited exposure to English: without out-of-school access to English and without in-class multimedia support, teachers were left to build speaking opportunities from limited materials alone.

Theme 2: Teacher and Institutional-Level Challenges

The second theme concerned challenges beyond the immediate classroom: administrative workload, limited preparation time, teachers own speaking confidence, tension between curriculum expectations and classroom conditions, limited professional development, and limited collaboration among teachers.

Administrative Workload and Limited Lesson-Planning Time

Participants indicated that their responsibilities extended well beyond classroom teaching, and that administrative and school-related duties reduced the time available to prepare speaking activities.

“Apart from teaching, I have to undertake various administrative and school-related activities. Due to the fact that I have other things to do, I do not get enough time to prepare speaking activities for my students.” (T1)

“When I have too much administrative tasks, I am unable to prepare activities like pair work, group discussions, or any other speaking activities well, so sometimes I have to rely on the textbook.” (T3)

Preparing speaking lessons, selecting discussion topics, forming groups, planning role-play scenarios, and preparing monitoring strategies — requires time that participants described as difficult to protect given competing administrative demands.

Teachers’ English-Speaking Proficiency and Confidence

A second institutional-level theme concerned teachers’ own confidence in their spoken English. Some participants described discomfort with pronunciation, fluency, and spontaneity in English.

“I am not always fully confident in speaking English especially when I need to speak continuously and pronounce some words that I have never used before. For this reason, at some point I find myself more comfortable using simple English or describing something in Nepali.” (T2)

This finding is significant because English teachers are often the only fluent model of the language available to students with limited outside exposure; low confidence may discourage teachers from conducting lessons entirely in English or from organizing activities that call for spontaneous language use. Participants linked this challenge, in part, to limited prior experience and training opportunities in rural postings.

Curriculum Awareness and Implementation

Participants also described difficulty implementing curricular expectations for communicative competence under classroom conditions.

“Curriculum values speaking and communication, but it is hard to implement all these activities in the classroom since we have big classes, limited time and resources, and the need to get our students ready for the exam.” (T5)

This account illustrates a mismatch between the communicative orientation of the curriculum and the practical conditions of classroom instruction — large classes, limited resources, examination pressure, limited time, and variation in students’ English proficiency. It suggests that curriculum implementation depends not only on teachers’ awareness of

communicative goals but also on adequate preparation time, resources, and assessment alignment.

Limited Professional Development Opportunities

Limited access to professional development emerged as a further institutional constraint. Participants indicated a need for more opportunities to build both English fluency and pedagogical knowledge specific to teaching speaking.

“We do not get regular training or workshops that deal with teaching speaking skills. With more practice we will get a chance to know new ways to conduct speaking lessons and to motivate our students to speak English.”

[AUTHOR TO CONFIRM: The specific participant code (T1–T5) for this quotation was not indicated in the original manuscript and should be added for consistency with the other excerpts.]

Teaching speaking skills was described as requiring more than knowledge of grammar or textbook content including skill in managing pair and group work, motivating reluctant speakers, giving appropriate correction, and designing communicative activities suited to large, heterogeneous classes. Regular training, workshops, and mentoring were described as scarce in this rural setting.

Limited Collaboration Among Teachers

Participants also reported limited opportunity for professional collaboration with colleagues, despite recognizing its potential value for sharing classroom experience and materials.

“We have very few chances to meet and talk about how we teach speaking and what our classroom experience is. Mostly we all act independently, but discussing activities and ideas with other English teachers could greatly contribute to our teaching process.” (T2)

Because collaboration among teachers does not require costly equipment or infrastructure, participants’ accounts suggest it could be a comparatively low-cost avenue for improving speaking instruction in resource-scarce schools, even though administrative demands,

limited time, and the absence of structured opportunities for professional exchange currently limit it.

Theme 3: Adaptive Classroom Practices for Developing Speaking Skills

Despite the challenges described above, participants did not describe themselves as relying solely on traditional, teacher-centered instruction. They reported using several strategies to encourage students' spoken participation, addressing the study's second research question.

Pair Work and Group Discussion

Pair work and group discussion were widely used to give more students the opportunity to speak within limited class time.

"I always ask my students to do their work in pairs because in this way I give more students a chance to speak at the same time. They are also comfortable speaking with their friends than alone in front of the whole class." (T5)

"I divide students into small groups and give them a topic to discuss. In small groups, they can share their ideas and practice talking in English." (T1)

Participants described these activities as particularly useful for large classes, since they distribute speaking opportunities across more students simultaneously, and as feasible in a low-resource rural setting because they require no specialized equipment. Their effectiveness was described as depending on clear instructions, monitoring, and encouragement from the teacher.

Questioning as a Strategy for Encouraging Oral Participation

Questioning was described as a further strategy for encouraging spoken participation, often used to build students' confidence gradually.

"I often pose students some simple questions in English and motivate them to respond to them verbally. To begin with, I ask them some questions that require short answers as they feel more at ease responding to them." (T2)

"As students gain confidence, I ask open-ended questions and encourage them to elaborate on their thoughts or express their views in English. It makes them talk more and builds their confidence." (T4)

This progression from short, low-risk responses toward more elaborated open-ended answers suggests questioning functioned for these teachers not only as a way of checking comprehension but as a scaffold for building students' willingness to speak.

Role-Play and Communicative Activities

Participants also described using role-play and other communicative tasks to give students practice with English in situations resembling real-life use.

"I sometimes assign different roles to my students and ask them to perform certain situations like buying something from a shop, asking for information, or talking to a friend. Students like these kinds of activities and they are able to apply English in a practical situation." (T3)

Because students speak through an assumed role rather than as themselves, participants suggested role-play could reduce the self-consciousness associated with the fear of making mistakes described under Theme 1. Communicative activities more broadly were described as valuable for students with little opportunity to use English outside school.

Positive Feedback and a Supportive Classroom Environment

Finally, participants described using encouragement and selective correction to address students' hesitation and fear of making mistakes.

"When students try to speak English, I encourage them even if they make mistakes. I don't correct all mistakes at once because they can feel ashamed and be afraid of speaking. I try to make them feel confident and comfortable." (T1)

This practice responds directly to the affective barrier identified in Theme 1: rather than treating error correction as the priority, participants described prioritizing students' willingness to attempt speech, on the reasoning that constant correction could interrupt fluency and reinforce fear of speaking.

Read together, the three themes suggest a pattern rather than a list of unconnected problems: examination pressure, large classes, and limited resources reduced the opportunities available for communicative speaking practice in class, which combined with limited exposure to English outside school appears, in participants' accounts, to have contributed to students'

hesitation and fear of error; in response, teachers adopted low-resource, low-technology adaptive strategies (pair work, questioning, role-play, supportive feedback) that partially compensate for these constraints without requiring additional materials, time, or training.

Discussion

The results indicate that speaking instruction in this rural secondary-school context is shaped jointly by classroom, learner, teacher, and institutional factors, and that these factors interact rather than operate independently. This section interprets the three themes in relation to prior research and to the study's Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) framework, and considers what the findings suggest about rurality and about the study's contribution.

Large class size emerged as the primary classroom-level barrier, reducing individual speaking time and complicating the monitoring of interaction. This finding is consistent with Sharma (2020), who links large class size to weaker speaking development among students in Nepal, and extends that finding by showing specifically how teachers in Tribeni experience and respond to this constraint — for example, by shifting toward pair and group work rather than abandoning speaking practice altogether. The problem was compounded, in participants' accounts, by limited opportunity to use English outside the classroom, which is particularly consequential in a rural community where the classroom is effectively the only site of oral practice; this pattern is not merely a scaled-up version of a general large-class problem but one specific to settings where the classroom cannot be supplemented by outside exposure.

Examination-oriented teaching was a second major constraint, and participants' accounts of prioritizing reading, writing, and grammar over speaking align with Gass (2002) and Harmer (2007), who describe speaking as being deprioritized when assessment is written. What this study adds is a more specific account of the mechanism: participants did not describe disagreeing with the curriculum's communicative goals (Curriculum Development Center, 2007, 2009) but described being unable to reconcile those goals with an assessment system that does not reward oral competence, given limited time and large classes. Read through the CLT framework, this represents a structural rather than an attitudinal barrier to communicative teaching — the constraint lies less in what teachers believe about speaking instruction than in what the assessment and time structure of their schools make practical.

Students' fear of making mistakes, a third classroom-level finding, corresponds to psychological barriers to oral participation described by Juhana (2012) in other EFL settings. In this study, the finding was closely tied to the institutional and classroom conditions already discussed: large classes limited teachers' capacity to give shy or anxious students individual attention and support, suggesting that this affective barrier is not simply an individual-student characteristic but is shaped by the same classroom conditions that limit speaking opportunities generally.

Teachers' own confidence in spoken English, identified under Theme 2, is consistent with Nunan (1995) and Harmer (2007), both of whom describe teacher proficiency as a determinant of classroom speaking practice, and with Kumaravadivelu's (2006) argument that ongoing professional development is necessary to sustain communicative competence. The present findings extend this literature by situating teacher confidence within a specific set of institutional pressures administrative workload, limited planning time, and scarce professional development that participants described as jointly limiting their capacity to teach communicatively, rather than treating confidence as an isolated individual trait.

Despite these constraints, participants described using pair work, group discussion, questioning, role-play, and supportive feedback — strategies consistent with the interactional and learner-centered principles of CLT (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Interpreted through the distinction drawn earlier between CLT as an intended pedagogy and the contextually constrained classroom reality, these strategies read less as full implementation of communicative methodology and more as targeted adaptations: pair and group work distribute limited speaking time across large classes; role-play manufactures a simulated communicative context where authentic contact with English speakers is otherwise unavailable; and selective, encouraging feedback directly addresses the fear of error documented under Theme 1. In this sense, teachers were not failing to implement CLT so much as implementing a version of it reshaped by rural constraints a distinction that is difficult to see without examining classroom-level, teacher-level, and institutional constraints together, as this study does.

Because this study did not collect data from urban or better-resourced Nepali schools, it cannot make a direct empirical rural–urban comparison. Read against the broader applied-linguistics literature, however, the specific combination of constraints described here an

examination-driven system operating with large classes, limited multimedia infrastructure, and constrained professional development corresponds to the conditions the literature identifies as most inhospitable to full CLT implementation (Richards, 2015; Richards & Rodgers, 2014), conditions that are generally less severe in better-resourced, urban educational settings with smaller classes and more reliable access to materials and training. This comparison should be read as literature-based contextualization rather than as an empirical finding of this study.

Taken together, the findings suggest that improving speaking instruction in this and similar rural contexts cannot be reduced to changing individual teachers' classroom techniques. The three themes point instead to a chain of interacting constraints examination pressure, large classes, and limited resources reducing communicative opportunity; limited outside exposure reinforcing that scarcity; and constrained professional development and institutional workload limiting teachers' capacity to respond to which teachers have responded with low-resource, low-technology adaptations broadly aligned with CLT principles. This differs from earlier Nepal-focused research, which has generally examined individual barriers (class size, exposure, teacher confidence) rather than their combination, or has described classroom practices without connecting them explicitly to the constraints they appear to address. The contribution of this study lies in showing how these barriers interact within one rural context and in identifying teachers' adaptive strategies as direct, low-resource responses to that combination of constraints, rather than as generic good practice.

Conclusion and Implications

This study examined the challenges secondary-level English teachers face in teaching speaking skills, and the classroom practices they use in response, among five teachers in community schools in Tribeni Rural Municipality, Rukum West, Nepal. Three interacting sets of constraints emerged: classroom-level challenges (large class size, limited exposure to English, examination-oriented teaching, students' fear of mistakes, and inadequate resources); teacher- and institutional-level challenges (administrative workload, limited planning time, teachers' own speaking confidence, curriculum-assessment mismatch, and limited professional development and collaboration); and adaptive classroom practices (pair work, group discussion, questioning, role-play, and supportive feedback) that participants used to work within these constraints.

Interpreted through Communicative Language Teaching, these adaptive practices represent low-resource, contextually reshaped attempts to enact communicative principles rather than either full implementation of, or straightforward departure from, CLT. This distinction matters for how the findings should be used: it suggests that supporting speaking instruction in rural Nepal is less a matter of persuading teachers to adopt communicative methods — participants were, in a constrained way, already doing so — and more a matter of addressing the structural conditions (class size, assessment design, resources, planning time, professional development) that limit how far those methods can be taken.

For teachers, the findings suggest that low-resource strategies such as pair work, questioning, and selective feedback are viable ways to expand speaking opportunities even without additional materials or training, and that managing students' fear of error may be as important as the specific technique used. For schools and local education authorities, the findings point to administrative workload and lesson-planning time as concrete, addressable barriers, and to teacher collaboration as a low-cost avenue for professional support that does not depend on external resources. For curriculum and assessment bodies, the mismatch participants described between communicative curricular goals and written examinations suggests that assessment reform, or at least clearer guidance on reconciling the two, may be necessary for communicative goals to be realized in practice rather than remaining aspirational. For professional development providers, the findings indicate a need for training that reaches rural teachers specifically and that addresses both English proficiency and pedagogical strategies for large, resource-constrained classrooms.

Because this study draws on the accounts of five teachers from one rural municipality, its findings are context-specific rather than statistically generalizable; they are best understood as offering contextual insight that may be transferable, with appropriate caution, to similarly under-resourced rural settings rather than as claims about rural Nepal as a whole. Future research could extend this work through classroom observation to examine how the adaptive practices described here are actually enacted in the classroom, through comparative studies that include urban or better-resourced schools to test the rural–urban contrasts suggested here through literature alone, and through larger or multi-site qualitative or mixed-methods studies that examine whether the

pattern of interacting constraints identified in Tribeni holds across other rural municipalities in Nepal.

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