

Empowering Students' Language Learning Strategies through Effective Teaching: Insights from Successful Nepalese English Practitioners

<https://doi.org/10.3126/tej.v11i1.54460>

Hari Maya Sharma, PhD.

hmsharma1971@gmail.com

Article History

Received

Revised

Accepted

20th December, 2022

22nd January, 2023

5th February, 2023

Abstract

English proficiency is a crucial aspect of education in Nepal, as it is in high demand in various professional fields. The development of proficiency depends on the strategies used in learning. So, this study aims to explore the learning strategies used by Nepalese English practitioners to develop their English proficiency over different time spans. The study also examines to what extent these strategies were influenced by formal teaching and teachers. The study collected English learning stories from twenty English practitioners across various parts of Nepal via email. Using the 'analysis of narratives' framework, also known as the 'paradigmatic mode of analysis,' the narratives were analysed to identify the primary learning strategies employed by the practitioners. The study found that the majority of the practitioners used imitation, recitation, and copying as their primary learning strategies. However, a few practitioners also developed their unique strategies. Formal instruction and teacher encouragement had significant influence on the learning strategies employed by nearly all of the participants. The findings suggest that formal instruction and teacher encouragement play an essential role in shaping the English language learning strategies of Nepalese English practitioners. This study has important implications for language educators as it provides insights into the learning strategies that may be effective in promoting English language proficiency among Nepalese learners.

Keywords: Analysis of narratives; learning strategies; narrative analysis; Nepalese English practitioners; Paradigmatic mode of analysis

Introduction

English language proficiency is a high demand in various professional fields in Nepal. While formal instruction and teacher encouragement play a significant role in shaping English language learning strategies, it is unclear to what extent teaching can influence student learning strategies. To explore this issue, the present article examines the success stories of Nepalese English practitioners and analyzes of how teaching may have shaped their learning strategies. Here are the two success stories if the first story,

Practitioner A corrected her pronunciation after being corrected by students and bought an English dictionary to practice new words. While in the next story, Practitioner B used newspapers to improve their English reading skills and gradually reduce their reliance on Nepali translations.

After I passed SLC, I started teaching in a private school. Beyond English, I had to teach Science, too. The first teaching item was ‘Animals’. I read out different types of animals; tiger, goat, deer, dog, hippopotamus, and tortoise. Listening to my pronunciation of ‘tortoise’/tɔrto’waiz/ some children laughed and corrected it. I felt embarrassed and tried to correct my pronunciation immediately, but could not. Then, I bought the “Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (4th Ed.)”. Then, I practised pronunciation of new words before going to the classroom. Sometimes, I used to superscript the pronunciation of each word in Devanagari Script until it would be habituated for me. (Practitioner A)

I used to buy “The Gorkha Patra” and “The Rising Nepal” the first is published in Nepali medium and the second is published in English medium and would read the same news article published in both newspapers, I would firstly read the news published in ‘The Gorkha Patra’, then, would read it in “The Rising Nepal”. While reading, I used to write difficult words with Nepali equivalence and tally with the Nepali version of the same news. This process used to be continued until I could understand the message written in English without the support of Nepali news. (Practitioner B)

Different learning theories have explained the process and strategies of learning quite difficulty. Psychological theories, including behaviorism and mentalism, have had an impact on language learning and teaching. Behaviorism theory emphasizes the relationship between stimulus and response (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2013). As a result, language learning tends to be practice-based, and techniques such as imitation, repetition, and reinforcement are commonly employed in language teaching and learning (Goldin-Meadow, 2019; Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2013). Although this approach has been influential in developing teaching techniques and learning strategies, scholars have concluded that imitators do not learn a language as quickly as non-imitators (Goldin-Meadow, 2019). In contrast to behaviorism, Noam Chomsky emphasized the innate capacity of children to learn in the 1960s (Anastasi & Cyprien, 2021; Chomsky, 2021; Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2013). Chomsky believes that children can learn a linguistic system without explicit input (Goldin-Meadow, 2019). Apart from these debates, scholars, such as Oxford (1990), focus on the importance of “self-direction” in developing a learner’s proficiency in a new language (see also Ella, 2018). Additionally, Goldin-Meadow (2019) highlights theories of connectionism and constrained learning, which have developed over time.

Scholars shifted their focus towards investigating how individual learners learn a new language, what techniques and styles they use, and what their preferred methods of learning are. According to Pritchard (2009), learning preferences are the choices made by individual learners in adopting learning styles influenced by their environment, emotions, social surroundings, and physical conditions. Schmeck (1988) defines learning strategy as a set of procedures and skills used for learning. Oxford (1990, 2010) explains that learning strategies are specific actions and techniques used by learners to solve learning problems, accomplish tasks, make learning easy, and achieve learning objectives. As Oxford (2008) notes, the second language learning strategy is a conscious goal-oriented action that learners take to enhance their target language. Learners are encouraged to become active participants who can influence both the processes and outcomes of their own learning, rather than passive recipients of knowledge.

Thus, as Oxford (2008) argues, “The more learning strategy an individual employs in their learning, the more autonomous they may become” (p.52). Oxford (1990, p.9) identified twelve main characteristics of language learning strategies. These include the fact that they can be either explicit or implicit, that they are a conscious decision made by the learner to achieve a specific learning or communication goal, that they can be used to support various aspects of language learning, and that they are not fixed or restricted to language learning alone. Additionally, strategies are influenced by various factors, they can be taught, and can be categorized in different ways. They can also be used either individually or in combination, and their effectiveness depends on the learner’s skill level. Successful learners can strategically use these strategies to achieve their goals, and effective language learning strategies can improve learners’ language proficiency. Several factors influence language learning strategies. These include socio-cultural, situational, and personal factors. Learners’ beliefs, language teaching methods, the target language, task requirements, and learning environment are some of the primary factors that influence their learning strategies (Gowans, 1999). Beliefs, for instance, have been found to influence the use of language learning strategies both inside and outside of the classroom (Bialystok, 1981 as cited in Gowans, 1999; Howwitz, 1987; Nyikos & Oxford, 1993). Learners with specific career orientations tend to choose functional, independent, and resourceful strategies, while experienced learners tend to use more learning strategies than inexperienced learners (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989 as cited in Gowans, 1999).

The situational factors of the task, the target language, and the language teaching method also play a crucial role in learners’ language learning strategies (Bialystok, 1981; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Politzer, 1983 as cited in Gowans, 1999). The language teaching method has a significant impact on students’ language learning behaviours, both inside and outside of the classroom (Politzer, 1983 as cited in Gowans, 1999).

Furthermore, learners can employ various strategies outside the classroom language learning such as speaking and practicing with native speakers, conversing with peers, listening to FM/radio, watching TV shows or movies, and reading newspapers, novels, stories, magazines, and periodicals in the target language.

Being informed about these concepts of multiple language learning strategies and hearing the stories (quoted above) of two higher-level Nepalese English practitioners during informal conversations, I was, firstly, encouraged to explore the learning strategies the majority of Nepalese English practitioners (who are in higher level posts) used to develop their English proficiency. Secondly, it increased my interest to analyse whether their strategies were influenced by their teachers' teaching and mentors' mentoring or something else. To fulfil these objectives, twenty successful higher-level senior English practitioners working in different parts of the country were selected using a purposive sampling technique, and collected their stories of English learning strategies. The study was done applying the given analytical framework.

Analytical Framework

Several frameworks have been suggested to examine narratives, such as Polkinghorne's (1995) models of narrative analysis, Mishler's (1995) models, and Labov's (1972) models. These frameworks are important for analyzing narratives. Kim (2016) extensively discusses these models in her book. According to Polkinghorne (1995), there are two modes of narrative analysis: "analysis of narratives" and "narrative analysis." Analysis of narratives, also known as the paradigmatic mode of analysis, aims to identify common themes and classify general features of stories into different categories, like other qualitative studies. It then examines the relationships among the categories to produce knowledge from a set of evidences. In contrast, narrative analysis involves analyzing actions and events in the stories by creating a plot that emphasizes the narrative mode of thought. It configures the data into a coherent whole and presents the disconnected data as a meaningful whole to bring out narrative meanings. It emphasizes connotation and sustains the metaphoric richness of the story that is not explicit in the stories. The analyzers recursively move from part to whole or vice versa, fill the gaps between events and actions to smooth the narratives, and acknowledge the significant space of lived experience in the story (Polkinghorne, 1995; Kim, 2016).

The narrative analysis model developed by Mishler (1995) concentrates on the contextual meaning-making of experiences through the researcher's retelling of stories. The context includes various purposes, genres, theoretical assumptions, types of data analytic methods and strategies, based on Halliday's (1973) concepts of language function, reference and structure. According to Mishler (1995), narrative analysis is a problem-focused inquiry that focuses on three key tasks: reference and temporal order, the telling and the told. Therefore, the first task is to summarize what has been told

in the telling, the second is to reconstruct the told from the telling, and the third is to impose a ‘told’ on the telling and make a telling form the told by shaping textual coherence and structure through the narrativization of experience (Kim, 2016).

Labov’s (1972) four narrative analysis models are widely used, especially for analyzing oral storytelling. The first model focuses on examining the structure of the narrative and identifying its plot or themes using specific criteria such as abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result, resolution, and coda. The second model involves rearranging the events of the story to reconstruct the “told” from the “telling.” The third model imposes a story pattern on the “telling” to create a cohesive narrative, and the fourth model uses nonverbal data such as pictures, signs, symbols, and other graffiti to infer a story and create a telling from the “told”.

The scholarships mentioned in this section offered different approaches to analyze the stories of successful Nepalese English practitioners. However, using all of them at once for a small dataset could be misleading. Hence, in this study, the data analysis is based on Polkinghorne’s (1995) “paradigmatic mode of narrative analysis,” while taking insights from each model.

The decision to employ Polkinghorne’s (1995) “paradigmatic mode of narrative analysis” in this study was based on several considerations. First, this mode of analysis offers a systematic way of identifying common themes and categories within the narratives of the Nepalese English practitioners, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of their learning strategies. Additionally, this mode of analysis allows for the identification of relationships between categories, leading to the production of new knowledge from the collected evidence. Furthermore, the paradigmatic mode of analysis emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the lived experience of the storytellers, ensuring that the narratives are not reduced to mere data points but are instead understood in their full context. While other models of narrative analysis, such as those proposed by Mishler (1995) and Labov (1972), were considered, the “paradigmatic mode of analysis” was ultimately chosen as it offered the best fit for the research questions and data set at hand.

Research Methods

This research employed narrative inquiry to investigate the diverse learning strategies utilized by Nepalese English practitioners over their lifetimes to improve their English proficiency within the Nepalese context.

To collect data for this study, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select 20 English language practitioners who had varying levels of proficiency and were from different area. The sample consisted of 5 female and 15 male practitioners, including 5 professor, 6 lecturers, 8 permanent secondary level teachers, and 1 school level

teacher-trainer. Of these practitioners, 4 were retired and the others were employed in various institutions across Nepal. Geographically, 3 practitioners were from the eastern region, 12 were from the western region, and 2 were from the mid-western region of the country. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, practitioners were selected based on the availability of their mobile phones in the researcher's contact list, which allowed for guiding questions to be sent via email. The sample was chosen to represent different strata, resulting in a total of 20 English practitioners.

In the first round, the participants were contacted over the phone, and the purpose of the study was explained to them. Their oral consent was taken, and their email IDs were collected. The participants were then sent a request letter, which included examples of two learning strategies that were used during English as a foreign language learning. They were asked to provide written stories via email in English. All the stories were downloaded and printed. The stories were read and reread, and the interesting parts in each story were highlighted. The stories were then coded using three techniques: descriptive coding, NVivo, and process coding. Descriptive coding involves coding with the main theme of the original word or phrase as the code, and process coding uses the gerund form in the code to show what is happening. The coded stories were inserted into a table with three columns: the story, primary codes, and categories. The themes were developed using Polkinghorne's (1995) paradigmatic mode of analysis during the coding process.

Analysis of the Data

The analysis of the data revealed that the Nepalese English practitioners utilized a range of methods to enhance their English proficiency. Most of these techniques were shaped by language teaching methods and task requirements encountered in the classroom. While some strategies emerged spontaneously, they were often influenced by external factors, such as teacher encouragement or embarrassment from poor English performance. Many practitioners also employed teaching as a learning strategy. The learning strategies employed by the Nepalese English practitioners are thematized under various headings.

Strategies and struggles: learning through mistakes

The study found that almost all of teacher-guided strategies emphasized rote learning and memorization. The school-level English learners were engaged in reciting and memorizing not necessarily because they were keen on improving their English skills, but rather to avoid potential punishment from teachers. The story of a well-known English professional reveals this phenomenon:

English used to be taught through translation into Nepali, with a heavy emphasis on reading and memorizing word meanings. Each word and its corresponding

Nepali meaning was called a “word-meaning” in everyday language. During class, teachers would write the word-meanings on the blackboard, and students were expected to copy them down. At home, students would recite the word-meanings throughout the night. The following day, the teacher would ask each student the meaning of the words, and those who were unable to provide the correct answer were punished.

Besides learning within the pressure, as per some practitioners, making mistakes while teaching English could be beneficial for learning. These mistakes would often lead to embarrassment, but they also presented an opportunity for the teacher to gain the trust of their students by overcoming the challenge. The following excerpt provides an example:

I vividly recall an incident that happened to me in Grade 3 during a Mathematics class. As we stood in line to get our homework checked, I finished early and asked the teachers, “May I come in, sir” when I actually meant to ask, “May I go to the toilet?” My classmates found it amusing and laughed, which made me nervous and caused me to repeat the mistake multiple times. Finally, the teacher asked if I needed to use the restroom, and I nodded my head. The teacher granted permission, and I went

The given text describes a personal experience of the practitioner during her third-grade mathematics class. She mistakenly asked the teacher for permission to “come in” instead of asking to use the restroom. This mistake caused her classmates to laugh and her to become nervous, leading to them repeating the mistake several times. Eventually, the teacher asked if she needed to use the restroom, and after nodding in agreement, the teacher allowed the writer to go. This experience serves as an example of how mistakes can sometimes be embarrassing but can also serve as a learning opportunity.

The memory of this incident stuck with her and presented itself as a difficulty. However, it motivated her to turn to more advanced dictionaries to master the accurate pronunciation, grammatical function, and contextual definition of words. Similarly, other individuals who sought to improve their English proficiency also used instances of embarrassment as a catalyst for growth, taking each experience as an opportunity to learn and overcome challenges.

Teachers influence and learners’ autonomy: Learning through listening

The majority of the English language practitioners reported that their learning styles and strategies during their school education were largely shaped by their teachers. For instance, they would complete reading assignments and memorize vocabulary words because their teachers required them to do so, and failure to comply would result in punishment. However, upon entering university, they had more autonomy in choosing

their learning strategies and were not forced by their teachers to do so. Nonetheless, the teachers still played a crucial role in encouraging and motivating them to do their best. The following excerpt discloses this fact:

My exposure to Richard Dutli, the mathematics teacher at university, was my inspiration for learning English. Every day he would bring new phrases, sentences and ask me their meanings. In this way, I often got chances to converse in English every day. During holidays, I used to go to Lakeside to talk with tourists. It was a great opportunity for me to learn English better.

This excerpt exposes the personal account of a renowned English practitioner's experience with learning English. He explains that his inspiration for learning English came from his exposure to Richard Dutli, his mathematics teacher at university. This excerpt also highlights the role of exposure and daily practice in language learning. The practitioner's exposure to English through his teacher and through conversations with tourists allowed him to practice his language skills on a regular basis, which in turn improved his proficiency. It also suggests that having a supportive and encouraging teacher, like Richard Dutli, can be a valuable asset in language teaching.

Similarly, another experienced English practitioner enhanced his English language skills by following an English teacher's teaching methods. He took it upon himself to improve his English by purchasing a monolingual dictionary and engaging in extensive reading outside of school—either at home or while traveling to school. He also collected various composition books written in English and read them, regularly read newspapers, and collected and read simplified versions of original books before attempting to read newspapers, and collected and read simplified versions of original books before attempting to read the original texts. In addition to reading at home and in school, other practitioners expanded their vocabulary by listening to others while commuting to and from school. The following story discloses this fact:

Every day, I had to walk for about an hour from my village to school. Many of us had to walk up and down to get to school. Most of the students in grade X would read and recite vocabulary aloud on the way, and I used to listen to them. Although I did not understand the meaning of the words, I could remember them. I was fortunate to have good listening skills. I learned most of my vocabulary from listening to others and also from reading.

This excerpt describes one of the English practitioners' experiences of going to school in a rural area where he had to walk for about an hour from his village to school. He mentions that many students, including those in grade X, would read and recite vocabulary aloud while walking to school, and he would listen to them. Although he did not understand the meaning of the words, he was able to remember them due to his good listening skills.

He also mentions that he learned most of vocabulary from listening to others and reading. This suggests that he is someone who values and relies on his ability to listen and learn from others, rather than solely relying on his own understanding or knowledge. Additionally, the fact that he was able to learn and remember new vocabulary despite not understanding its meaning highlights his dedication to learning and his resourcefulness in using the resources available to him. Overall, this excerpt highlights the importance of listening and learning from others as a means of acquiring knowledge and skills.

3-Beyond: Textbook, Monolingual English and English Specialization

A few practitioners improved their English by reading additional materials beyond textbooks such as compositions and consulted dictionaries to understand the texts. Only a small number of learners read English novels, magazines, and picture stories in the school library during their school days. The following excerpt reveals this fact:

In addition to the English textbook, we were encouraged to consult other books such as ‘P.C. Wren’s Composition Book’ and other books that were part of the old education system. Personally, I borrowed various books from older students and read them.

This excerpt describes the resources and materials available to the practitioner for learning English. She states that in addition to the English textbook, she was encouraged to consult other books such as ‘P.C. Wren’s Composition Book’ and other books that were part of the old education system. This suggests that her English language learning was not limited to a single textbook, but rather she was encouraged to seek out additional resources to aid in her learning. Furthermore, she mentions that she personally borrowed various books from older students and read them. This indicates that she was proactive in seeking out additional learning resources and was resourceful in using the resources available to her. It also suggests that she recognized the importance of self-directed learning and was willing to take the initiative to improve her language skills beyond what was assigned or suggested by her teachers. In addition, this excerpt highlights the importance of having access to a variety of resources for language learning and the value of being resourceful and self-directed in seeking out additional learning opportunities.

But some other practitioners used different strategies beyond monolingual practices of English such as visual aids and Newspaper comparison and translation to develop their English language skills. One strategy involved reading English texts while translating and creating acronyms to improve both reading and content knowledge. Another practitioner began editing local English newspapers, writing comments and critiques, despite not being confident in their English writing abilities. Listening skills were commonly improved through listening to BBC and other English news broadcasts available in Nepal, attending speech competitions, and conversing with classmates. However, another individual used visual aids and translated texts into Nepali, while

also practicing English pronunciation following Nepali rules. Another practitioner would buy two newspapers, 'Gorkha Patra' in Nepali and 'The Rising Nepal' in English, and compare the news articles. He would then make a list of difficult words and consult a bilingual/monolingual dictionary to learn their meanings, word classes, and pronunciation. The following piece of story justifies it:

In the past, I used to purchase both 'The Gorkha Patra' and 'The Rising Nepal' newspapers. I would first read the news articles published in Nepali in 'The Rising Nepal.' Whenever I encountered difficult words, I would write down their Nepali equivalents, and tally them with the Nepali version of the same news article. I repeated this process until I could comprehend the English news article without relying on the Nepali news article for support.

The text describes a language learning strategy that the practitioner used in the past. The practitioner would purchase two newspapers, 'The Gorkha Patra' and 'The Rising Nepal', and read news articles in both Nepali and English. When encountering difficult words in the English version, he would write down their Nepali equivalents and compare them with the Nepali version of the same news article. By repeating the process, he gradually became able to comprehend the English news article without relying on the Nepali version for support. This strategy combines reading in both languages, using a bilingual dictionary, and comparing and contrasting the two versions to enhance comprehension.

Beyond English specialization, some practitioners enhanced their English by pursuing content-rich courses. They shared that they pursued specialized formal courses offered by the same university in addition to taking an English specialization course under the Faculty of Education. These additional courses were not only related to the same faculty or subject, but also included courses in different faculties and subjects such as humanities, sociology, and anthropology. The purpose of taking these courses was to acquire both rich content knowledge and language proficiency. The following excerpt of a practitioner reveals this fact:

During my intermediate studies, I pursued English literature as my major subject. Although I received significant exposure to listening and reading for two years, I lacked adequate speaking practice due to my shyness in speaking English outside the classroom. When I began my Bachelor of Arts, I enrolled in an English Honours Course that covered 600 full marks of English literature, 200 full marks for compulsory English and 300 full marks for Allied History, all in English medium. This Honours Course provided me with ample opportunities to develop my English language skills. Later, I completed a one-year Bachelor of Education program, majoring in English, from Tribhuvan University, and a Master's degree in English literature from Bombay University. These academic pursuits further enhanced my oral and written communication skills in English.

The text describes the practitioner's educational background and how he developed his English language skills. He studied English literature as a major subject during his intermediate studies and gained exposure to listening and reading. However, he lacked speaking practice due to shyness outside the classroom. During his Bachelor of Arts, he enrolled in an English Honors Course that covered a wide range of English literature, compulsory English, and Allied History, all in English medium, which helped him improve his language skills. He also completed a one-year Bachelor of Education program, majoring in English, from Tribhuvan University and a Master's degree in English literature from Bombay University, which further improved his oral and written communication skills in English.

Breaking out of comfort zones: Creating relatable metaphors and similes

Some practitioners used membership in professional organizations like NELTA as a way to improve their English skills. Two practitioners shared that they were able to improve their English by studying TOEFL materials on their own, while others participated in various training sessions. Some individuals practiced speaking English by speaking in front of a mirror, and others would practice speaking on a specific topic with a roommate. The following piece of story expresses it:

During my English language learning journey, I used to practice speaking in front of a mirror. Over time, I gained confidence in my speaking abilities and was able to deliver speeches on various short topics in English in front of the school assembly by the time I reached Grade 8, despite previously being too scared to speak in class. This excerpt describes one of the practitioners' experiences of learning English and developing her speaking skills. She shares that she used to practice speaking in front of a mirror as part of her language learning journey. Through regular practice, she gained confidence in her speaking abilities over time. She then goes on to explain that she was eventually able to deliver speeches on various short topics in English in front of the school assembly by the time she reached Grade 8. This is a significant accomplishment, as it indicates that she was able to overcome her fear of speaking in public and develop her speaking skills to the point where she could deliver a speech in front of a large audience.

Overall, this excerpt highlights the importance of regular practice and persistence in language learning, as well as the value of pushing oneself out of one's comfort zone to develop new skills. It also shows that with dedication and effort, it is possible to overcome challenges and achieve significant progress in language learning.

Besides this, one strategy used by some practitioners was the use of metaphor or simile to conceptualize the meaning. As an example, one respondent shared:

My teacher once taught us the word 'hospital,' translating its meaning to 'Aspataal.'
Many of us had not heard the Nepali word 'Aspataal' before. Instead, we knew

‘Aanpibal’ (the name of a village in the district where a missionary hospital was located) as the center for medical treatment. This helped us understand the meaning of ‘hospital’ as ‘Aanpibal’.

The importance of relatable examples and comparisons in language learning is highlighted in this excerpt. Specifically, the use of metaphor or simile is discussed as an effective strategy for understanding and learning new words. One example provided is of a teacher using the word ‘hospital’ and translating it to ‘Aspataal’ for students. However, many of the students were not familiar with this word, so the teacher used a comparison to the village of ‘Aanpibal’ where a missionary hospital was located. By relating the meaning of ‘hospital’ to a place the students were already familiar with, they were able to understand the new word more easily. This strategy helped make new words and concepts more accessible and understandable to learners. In language learning, relatable examples and comparison can be powerful tools for visualizing and conceptualizing the meaning of new words and ideas.

Teaching as a learning strategy

Some practitioners opted to enroll in additional English specialization courses after completing their Bachelor’s degree in other subjects, while others changed their minor specializations to English after being impressed by certain teachers’ teaching styles. In addition to various strategies used to improve their English language skills, many practitioners used “teaching” as a learning strategy. When they became teachers in private schools, they needed to ensure that the content was understood by their students. To achieve this, they would first read relevant materials and texts at home, and practice delivering lectures with ample examples in English. These activities significantly contributed to the development of their English language skills. Some programs were sponsored by English-speaking countries, and for teaching, individuals had to read, speak, listen, and learn vocabulary from the recommended textbooks at all costs. Let’s see the following excerpt of one of the practitioners:

Teaching in an English medium school compelled me to learn, develop, and refine my English language skills. The school’s emphasis on the English language, along with its requirements and priorities, helped shape my career in English.

The text provides a clear and concise statement about how teaching in an English medium school influenced the practitioner’s English language skills and career. The use of strong verbs such as ‘compelled’, ‘develop’, and ‘refine’ effectively convey the practitioner’s active engagement in the process of improving his language proficiency. The mention of the school’s emphasis on the English language, requirements, and priorities adds context and credibility to the statement, demonstrating how external factors can contribute to one’s language learning and career development. Overall, the text effectively conveys the practitioner’s experience and highlights the importance of context and external factors in language learning.

In the similar line, another practitioner reveals that she improved her English during guiding/teaching juniors. In Nepal, teachers are still considered the primary source of knowledge, therefore, Nepalese teachers feel compelled to speak fluently and clearly. To gain students' trust, teachers must engage in activities such as reading, increasing their vocabulary, and developing their ability to explain concepts clearly. When teaching various subjects at different levels, teachers often come across unfamiliar words, so they need to consult a dictionary and read to understand the context. The following excerpt of the practitioner shows this fact:

To improve my English, I used to help my cousin's children with almost all of their subjects, except for Mathematics, when they were in secondary school. I communicated with them in English, which helped me to develop, share, and refine my English proficiency.

This excerpt describes the practitioner's strategy for improving English proficiency, which involved helping cousins with school subjects (excluding Mathematics) and communicating with them in English. The strategy facilitated regular practice of spoken English and improved reading and writing skills. Exposure to various subjects and vocabulary expanded knowledge and overall English proficiency. Sharing knowledge with the children reinforced her own understanding of subjects and the English language.

Discussion and Conclusion

Affirming the role of behaviorist theory (Goldin-Meadow, 2019; Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2013), one of the main findings of the analysis is that teacher-guided strategies in schools in Nepal heavily emphasize rote learning and memorization. Students engage in reciting and memorizing not necessarily to improve their English skills, but to avoid punishment from teachers. However, making mistakes while learning English could be beneficial for learning, as it presents an opportunity for students to learn and overcome challenges. The personal experience of English practitioner during their third-grade mathematics class serves as an example of how mistakes can sometimes be embarrassing but can also serve as a learning opportunity. This experience motivated the practitioner and others to seek out more advanced resources to improve their English proficiency.

The study suggests that teachers have a significant influence on the learning styles and strategies of English language learners. During their school education, learners' learning strategies were largely shaped by their teachers, and failure to comply with their requirements would result in punishment. However, upon entering university, learners had more autonomy in choosing their learning strategies and were not forced by their teachers to do so. Nonetheless, teachers still played a crucial role in encouraging and motivating learners to do their best.

The study also highlights the role of exposure and daily practice in language learning.

Practitioners' exposure to English through their teachers and conversations with tourists allowed them to practice their language skills regularly, which improved their proficiency. The study suggests that having a supportive and encouraging teacher can be a valuable asset in language teaching. Furthermore, As Oxford (1990) and also Ella (2018) focus on the importance of "self-direction" in developing a learner's proficiency in a new language, the study reveals the importance of self-motivated learning. One practitioner enhanced his English language skills by following an English teacher's teaching methods, engaging in extensive reading outside of school, and collecting and reading various composition books written in English. Others expanded their vocabulary by listening to others while commuting to and from school. It revealed the importance of listening and learning from others as a means of acquiring knowledge and skills. The study also found that using additional resources beyond textbooks, such as reading novels, magazines, and picture stories, can help improve language skills. Being proactive in seeking out additional resources and recognizing the importance of self-directed learning can also enhance language proficiency. Moreover, practicing language skills through different strategies, such visual aids, comparing and translating newspaper articles, and creating acronyms, can help develop language proficiency. Aligned to Oxford (1990, 2008, 2010), the study exposed that pursuing content-rich courses in addition to English specialization courses can provide opportunities to acquire both rich content knowledge and language proficiency. Similarly, a combination of exposure to the language, practice, and formal education, consistent with Oxford (1990), can significantly enhance oral and written communication skills in English.

Overall, these findings suggest that language learning is a complex process that requires a combination of resources, strategies, and educational opportunities. To improve language proficiency, learners need to be proactive, resourceful, and willing to seek out different types of language input and practice. Additionally, exposure to content-rich courses and formal education can provide opportunities to develop language skills and acquire rich content knowledge.

Justifying the argument offered by Oxford (2008), the study also highlights the importance of regular practice and pushing oneself out of one's comfort zone to develop new skills in language learning. Another strategy used by practitioners is the use of metaphors and similes to conceptualize the meaning of new words. Relatable examples and comparisons can be effective tools for visualizing and understanding new concepts in language learning.

Besides these, confirming Gowans (1999) and Oxford and Nyikos (1989 as cited in Gowans, 1999), the study also found that some practitioners improved their English language skills through the use of "teaching" as a learning strategy. The practitioners

enrolled in English specialization courses, changed their minor specializations to English, and read relevant materials and texts at home to practice delivering lectures in English. Teaching in an English medium school or guiding/teaching juniors also significantly contributed to the development of their English language skills. The study highlights importance of external factors such as the school's emphasis on the English language, requirements, and priorities, as well as engaging in activities such as reading, increasing vocabulary, and developing the ability to explain concepts clearly. The practitioners' strategies facilitated regular practice of spoken English and improved reading and writing skills, expanding their knowledge and overall English proficiency. The study found that the active engagement and dedication of the practitioners in the process of improving their language proficiency, and how external factors and context can contribute to one's language learning and career development.

In conclusion, the findings of this study affirm the role of exposed and strategies in language learning and underscore the importance of teacher-guided strategies in shaping learners' language learning strategies. The study also highlights the critical role daily practice, self-directed learning, and external factors in language learning. To improve language proficiency, learners need to be proactive, resourceful, and willing to seek out different types of language input and practice. They also need to be open to making mistakes as it can serve as a learning opportunity. Moreover, pursuing content-rich courses in addition to English specialization courses can provide opportunities to acquire both rich content knowledge and language proficiency. Finally, the study emphasizes the active engagement and dedication of the practitioners in the process of improving their language proficiency and how external factors and context can contribute to one's language learning and career development. The implications of these findings are relevant not only to English language teachers and practitioners in Nepal but also to second language learners worldwide.

(Mrs. Hari Maya Sharma, PhD, is a lecturer of English Education. She belongs to the Department of English Education, Faculty of Education, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur. She has a wide range of experiences in teaching and publication.)

References

- Anastasiu, U. & Cyprien, T. (2021). Theories underpinning language acquisition/ learning: Behaviourism, mentalism and cognitivism. *International Journal of Contemporary Applied Researches*, 8(4), 1-15.
- Chomsky, N. (2021). Linguistics then and now: Some personal reflections. *Annual Review of Linguistics*, 7, 1-11. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-linguistics-081720-111352>.
- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). Introduction: The discipline and practice of

- qualitative research. In Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 1-20). SAGE.
- Ella, J.R. (2018). Language Learning Strategies and English Proficiency of Grade 12 Students. *Paper presented at the DLSU Research Congress, 2018.*
- Freeman, M. (2015). Narrative as a mode of understanding: Method, theory, praxis. In Fina, Anna De & Georgakopoulou, Alexandra (Eds.), *The Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (pp.21- 37), WILEY Blackwell.
- Gass, S. M. & Selinker, L. (2008). *Second language acquisition: An introductory course* (3rd edition). Routledge.
- Goldin-Meadow, S. (2019). Theories of language acquisition. *Reference Module in Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Psychology*. [https:// doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-908324-5.23585-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-908324-5.23585-2)
- Gowans, C.J. (1999). *Second language learning strategies and factors affecting their use: a qualitative study of the experiences of missionaries in Nepal* (Unpublished master thesis). Victoria University of Technology, Faculty of Arts, Department of Communication, Language and Cultural Studies.
- Illeris, K. (Ed.) (2009). *Contemporary theories of learning*. Routledge.
- Kim, J. (2016). *Understanding narrative inquiry: The crafting and analysis of stories as research*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Klapper, J. (2008). Deliberate and incidental: vocabulary learning strategies in independent second language learning. In Hurd, Stella & Lewis, Tim (Eds.), *Language Learning Strategies in Independent Settings* (pp. 159-178). Multilingual Matters.
- Labov, W. (1972) *Sociolinguistic patterns*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Mishler, E.G. (1995, January). Models of Narrative Analysis: A Typology. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 5(2), 87 – 123. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1075/jnlh.5.2.01mod>.
- Mitchell, R., Myles, F., & Marsden, E. (2013). *Second language learning theories (3rd ed.)*. Routledge.
- Oxford, R. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Oxford, R. L. (2008). Hero with a thousand faces: Learner autonomy, learning strategies and learning tactics in independent language learning. In Hurd, Stella & Lewis, Tim (Eds.), *Language Learning Strategies in Independent Settings* (pp. 41-63). Multilingual Matters.
- Oxford, R. L. (2010). Language learning strategies in a nutshell: Update and ESL

- suggestions. In Richards, Jack C., & Renandya, Willy A. (Eds.), *Methodology in Language Teaching* (pp. 124-132). Cambridge University Press.
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (1995). *Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis*. Taylor & Francis Ltd.
- Pritchard, A. (2009). *Ways of learning: Learning theories and learning styles in the classroom (2nd ed.)*. Routledge.
- Schmeck, R.R. (1988). An Introduction to Strategies and Styles of Learning. In Schmeck, Ronald, R. (Ed.), *Learning strategies and learning styles* (pp.3-20), Springer Science + Business Media, LLC.
- Webster, L. & Mertova, P. (2007). *Using narrative inquiry as a research method*. Routledge.