Nepalese Teachers' Perceptions on Integrating Technology in English Language Teaching

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Abstract

The best innovative endeavor the teachers of English have assumed so far is to integrate technology in ELT classrooms, to improve increase self-directed learning, learners' motivation, integrated language skills, and self-learning environment. Accordingly, the integration of ICT in teaching and learning brings innovative learning environments and helps students to deal with knowledge in active, self-directed, and constructive ways. This paper explores the techniques of integrating information communication technology (ICT) in English language classrooms within the theoretical framework of connectivism. It demonstrates that integrating ICT tools in English language classrooms not only constitutes communicative and interactive sound skills but also the opportunity to construct ICT skills to make learners competitive in 21st-century skills. It further shows English language teachers' in-depth thoughts, beliefs, opinions, and practices of using ICTs in their classrooms. Moreover, it reveals that English language textbooks undervalue integrating ICT lessons and teachers are reluctant to use them and give main priority to the other grammatical and linguistic features.

Keywords: Self-directed learning, ICT tools, connectivism, 21st-century skills

Introduction

The integration of ICT in the teaching and learning process brings about powerful learning environments and helps students to deal with knowledge in active, creative, self-directed, and constructive ways. ICTs are playing an important role in this modern era, more particularly in teacher education in order to improve the quality of teaching-learning processes. For this, Coleman et.al (2016) assert the appropriate use of ICT in teaching transforms the learning environment from teacher-centered to learner-centered and makes a more interactive teaching-learning process. They further claim that shifting of emphasis from teaching to learning creates a more interactive and engaging learning environment for teachers and learners and as a result, it changes the role of the teacher from knowledge transmitter to as a facilitator, knowledge navigator, and a co-learner. We can see various resources and technologies have been used to improve the quality of the educational system. Teachers need to be aware of the impact of ICT tools in the field of education as well as their subject areas to make their teaching-learning more effective. This will help teachers to explore integrated technologies in their classroom teaching.

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It also helps in expanding accessibility in education to the increasingly digital workplace through information distribution, learning management systems, and managing of educational services. In this regard, Hughes (2013) defines the integration of communication and technology in teaching and learning to support the constructivist teaching and learning process for teachers and students of this digital age. Thus, the application of multi-media, computers, mobile phones, and other technological devices in teaching and learning ensures a very productive, interesting, motivating, interactive, and quality delivery of classroom instruction to address diverse learners' needs.

Similarly, the Integration of Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT) in education refer to the use of computer-based communication tools that incorporates into the daily classroom instructional process. In this digital period, teachers are seen as the key players in using ICTs in their teaching-learning process. This is due to the capability of ICTs in providing dynamic, interactive, and proactive teaching-learning environments in the classroom (Arnseth & Hatlevik, 2012). The main aim of integrating ICTs in teacher education is to improve and increase the quality, accessibility, and cost-efficiency of the delivery of instruction to students, and more importantly, it provides benefits from networking the learning communities to face the challenges of current globalization (Albirini, 2006). In the same way, Young, (2003) argues that the process of adoption of ICT is an ongoing and continuous process that fully supports the teaching and learning and information resources. Moreover, ICT integration in education ensures a technology-based teaching-learning process which is linked to the utilization of learning technologies in teaching-learning activities. Students will be familiar with various technologies and they will learn better within a technology-based environment, the issue of ICT integration in schools, specifically in the classroom practices.

More specifically, the teachers of English lavishly use recent technology in the classroom in order to grab the attention of their learners. They mostly use PowerPoint presentations that are designed with more pictures and video clippings. Furthermore, the interactive whiteboards are useful to teach the learners to interact with the learning materials and to integrate various learning styles into one experience with enhanced lessons and to display various media types that initiate interactive teaching-learning activities. While using the interactive boards, the learners can remember the content for a long time and the learners are more engaged in the classroom. In this technological era, most of the companies and projects are mainly focusing on developing supplementary teaching materials specially designed for interactive boards. As technology has been extensively used in all the educational institutions, the teachers of English can see interactive whiteboards in most of the technology adopted educational institutions in the contemporary world.

Thus, the teachers of English use technology not only to help but also to improve the learners' learning of the English language. The latest technology enables the English language teachers to adapt classroom activities so that it enhances the learning process of the English language. In fact, the internet makes the teachers of English easier to prepare lessons and it also makes them quicker in a matter of the interaction and communication of the learners.

To make this study feasible, it is organized as follows: The next section rationalizes the significance of ICT integrated teaching-learning activities then followed by the problem statement. The next section follows the integration of connectivism theory as it's a theoretical framework to connect it into the integrating ICT skills in English language teaching. Then it discusses the methodological part where it presents the data collection process and analyzes data and links those data to the theoretical insights associated with generated themes from the collected data in the result and discussions section. Finally, it concludes with the major findings and reflections of the study with some recommendations.

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Identically, the use of technology in education contributes a lot in the pedagogical aspects where the application of ICTs will lead to effective learning with the help and supports of ICT elements and components (Jamieson-Procter et al., 2013). In addition, ICT provides corresponding supports for both teachers and students involving them in effective learning with the help of the computers to meet the purpose of learning aids (Jorge et al., 2003). Thus, the need for ICTs integration in teacher education is crucial, because, with the help of technology, teaching and learning are not only happening in the school environment but also when both teachers and students are physically distanced. In the same way, Finger & Trinidad, (2002) argue that technology-based teaching and learning offers various interesting ways that include educational videos, the usage of databases, brainstorming, music, online courses, World Wide, Web (www) that will make the learning process more fulfilling and meaningful and students learn far more from these activities. More importantly, students will be benefited from ICTs integration in the teaching-learning process where they are not bounded to the limited curriculum and resources, instead of practical activities in a technology-based course are designed to help them to arouse their understanding about the subject matter is associated with technology-based teaching-learning activities. Furthermore, teachers design their lesson plans in an effective, creative, and interesting approach that would result in students' active learning.

Issue of the Statement

Talking about our Nepalese contexts, almost teachers are not able to handle ICT tools. They even don't know about using computers in their classrooms. In most of our schools, technical difficulties are seen as a major problem and they are unable to handle such kinds of difficulties in their teaching sector and as a result, they seemed to be frustrated towards these sorts of technological tools. Due to these sorts of difficulties and challenges, they are not able to meet the needs of 21st-century skills which are very much crucial for English teachers as well as students. If the same issues happen time and again, teachers will be discouraged from using such technologies because of their insufficient knowledge regarding ICT tools and more importantly, they are not given any assistance on these issues. In this regard, Turel and Johnson, (2012) revealed that technical problems become a major barrier for teachers. These problems include low internet connectivity, less training on ICT skills, knowledge about online courses, and making PowerPoint slides, searching resources on the internet, and using photocopy and printer as well. However, there are some exceptions in developed countries; Schools in the countries like Netherland, UK, USA, and other countries have recognized the importance of technical support to assist teachers to use ICT in their classroom (Yang & Wang, 2012).

On the other hand, infrastructure and facilities of ICTs are needed to supply to each school throughout the nation. It seems that the key factor in the use of ICT is sufficient computer labs and ICT equipment. Teachers are accessed by various ICT tools whenever they need them. Lack of adequate ICT equipment and internet access is one of the major problems in our Nepalese English language classrooms, especially, the schools of rural areas are facing such kinds of problems. Here is one example in Kenya, the research showed that some schools have a computer but this could be limited to one or not more than three computers in the office only. Even in schools with computers, the student-computer portion is high. Furthermore, the report revealed that most schools with ICT infrastructures are supported by parents' initiative or community power (Chapelle, 2011). The same problems are here in our contexts as well. Therefore, teachers' readiness and skills in using ICTs are playing a crucial role in the use of ICT in educational sectors.

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Moreover, teachers need sufficient ICT skills in the implementation of technology and to have high confidence to use it in the classroom. More importantly, teachers require insights into the pedagogical role of ICT, in order to use it meaningfully in their instructional process (Hennessy et al., 2005). Thus, this research seeks to understand English language teachers' perceptions of technology-based teaching and learning and integration of ICT in the Nepalese context. In the same way, I have generated my findings based on these two themes. As a result, this study aims to explore English language teachers' perceptions of ICT integration in their classrooms. Based on this purpose, this study is based on these research questions as to how do English language teachers integrate ICTs in their instructional practices? What attitude do the teachers of ELL hold towards ICT integration teaching-learning activities? 2. To what extent are the teachers able to handle educational technology in ELT? 3. To what extent are the teachers satisfied with the availability of technological supports in their institutions?

Theoretical Framework
This study is supported by this theoretical consideration of connectivism.

Connectivism

George Siemens and Stephen Downes developed a theory named connectivism, that came against behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism. This proposed learning theory has become a debate over whether it is a learning theory or instructional theory or merely a pedagogical view. Downes, (2007), assert that connectivism is characterized as a reflection of our society that is changing rapidly. In the same way, society is more complex, connected socially, global, and mediated by increasing advancements in technology. Similarly, connectivism is a conceptual framework that views learning as a network phenomenon influenced by technology and socialization (Siemens, 2006). In this 21st century, we people are surrounded, we are bounded, indeed, occupied by technology. It is leading to massive changes in the field of education, economy, the way we communicate and interact with each other, and progressively in the way we learn. In this digital age of connectivity and an accumulative social media, the educational institutions must find the ways of learning more permeable and fluid paths towards open source content and student-centered learning environments (Kamenetz, 2010). Otherwise, teacher educators and educational institutions have to face a massive challenge of change. In this regard, the founder of connectivism George Siemens (2004) argues that connectivism covers the way for a new model of learning, adequate to knowledge for the society, in which learning is a process of connecting specialized information sources because the internet has made a huge shift into the understanding of the nature of knowledge.

As we know, there are a lot of connections into a network that links between entities, in which it can be named nodes and each node has or has to have information as forms of knowledge. A node could be any entities like a person, a group of people, a computer, or ideas and communities. A change of data in a node makes data change in another node. Being connected into a network, the nodes play their role in sharing the information which can be transformed, by understanding, in true knowledge. In this theory, learning occurs when knowledge is activated by learners connecting to and participating in a learning community like their classrooms. Here, learning communities are defined as the clustering of similar areas of interest that allows them to have interaction, sharing, dialoguing, and thinking together among their pairs or groups (Siemens, 2005). As a result, participation results in conversations between learners and teachers where they are directly connected. Thus, it is characterized as the enhancement of how a student learns with

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the knowledge and perception gained through the addition of a personal network (Siemens, 2004). If teachers are updated and connected to these sorts of technological aids throughout the nation and international periphery, they can easily be able to meet the goals of 21st-century skills that are directly linked to it. As a result, the teaching-learning process will be more dynamic and fruitful.

Methodology

This study follows a qualitative approach as its research design. The study design draws meaning from the participants' teaching experiences and perspectives of the inclusion of ICT skills in their teaching-learning activities. I primarily collected data through face to face and phone interviews with three participants from Kathmandu and Rupandehi districts who have been teaching English at the bachelor's and secondary level institutional schools for more than 15 years. I used in-depth interviews keeping center to the theory, research purpose, and question given incorporating ICTs and practices of those issues in their teaching-learning activities. Furthermore, the information was generated by exploring the perspectives and practices of the teachers like how they integrate and connect those issues and teach them through practically. The data were analyzed by the participants' experiences of integrating Technological skills associated with their contexts.

Data were transcribed and analyzed from recordings and field notes to identify significant opinions, attitudes, experiences, and comments about the inclusion of ICT skills and practices of those issues by the teachers. Collected data were transcribed, coded, and generated the themes and further, those themes are based on the theoretical stance of connectivism where I explore teachers' perceptions, practices, beliefs, and the availability of these tools. And finally based on the same themes, findings are drawn.

Findings
The findings of the study denote the following themes.

Teachers' Perceptions of Integrating Technology-based Teaching and Learning

As we know, technology helps to provide proactive, easy access, and a comprehensive teaching-learning environment. Nowadays, the Ministry of education also provides a lot of facilities and training in order to enhance the use of advanced technologies in the teaching-learning process. Both of the participants seemed to be positive as they have been using technological aids in their classes for a long time. They also teach using power-point projector in their classrooms. The participant claimed, "*I often use power-point projector in the class because students feel comfortable listening and reading simultaneously, and also it makes me complete the course in time. I ask students to submit their assignments online through email.*" For this, Shyamlee, (2012) analyzed the use of multi-media technology in language teaching and found technology enhances student learning motivation and attention since it connects students in the practical processes of language learning via communication with each other.

Similarly, it was claimed that teachers are having high confidence and competency in using ICT in the classroom. Most of the students have high expectations of using ICT in classroom teaching as they are born and grown with technology aids. Additionally, it was found the integration of ICT mostly depends on the personal factors which define as self-perceptions of the teachers. The findings of this research also show the use of ICT tools in the classroom is helpful for teachers and students as well. Moreover, teachers' role seems more important especially using

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ICTs in pedagogy which could increase the better achievement of the students, their creativity, and thinking skills.

Integration of ICT in the Nepalese Academia

Talking about Nepalese academia, only a few lessons are related to ICTs, and the rest of the lessons are contained with literary texts, grammatical and linguistic features. Most of the teachers teach lessons orally rather involving students in using it. It was found that there is power-point projector in the classroom and teachers don't know how to use it, in making slides and presenting through it. In this context, they teach orally. In the textbooks of community schools, there is no computer subjects and students only see computer devices there. Participant-2 said, *'I teach English at the secondary level and there are only a few ICT-integrated lessons and I teach them orally. Students feel difficulties while teaching these lessons as if I could take them computer lab and engage them practicing on computers, It is easier to make them clear about difficult terms "* However, integration of ICT in the classroom is getting more important as it helps student in enhancing their collaborative learning skills as well as developing sound skills using ICT aids that stimulates social skills, problem-solving, self-reliance, responsibility and the capacity building to meet the needs of 21st-century skills. Then, students will be more creative thinkers and problem solvers. The main problems are teachers' skills in ICT, availability of internet, and accessibility of technological tools and, the government is still improving and upgrading the systems to be fully utilized by ICTs.

However, the Nepal Government is trying its best to provide ICT infrastructure in schools to improve the education standards but there are restraints and limitations to successfully implement such initiatives. The constraints are teachers' limited ICT skills, and the language of computers is difficult for the learners and inadequacy of ICT equipment gadgets and, another the lack of ICT knowledge is caused by limited ICT pieces of training and its' implementation and how to permeate ICT into English Language teaching.

Conclusion

It is concluded that the new era of using ICT aids in educational sectors should be developed rapidly to an appropriate extent in order to match and meet the capability and availability of students as well as teachers. The results of this study show that technology-based teaching and learning is more effective in comparison to traditional classrooms. This is because, using ICT tools and equipment help to create an active learning environment that makes it more interesting and effective for teachers, students, and whole educational sectors. The study also revealed that using technological aids appropriately brings a lot of benefits to teachers and learners that help them to solve their learning problems and find methods to use what they have learned in ways that are effective and meaningful. Finally, the integration of ICTs in the teaching-learning process needs to take serious consideration in order to increase the whole educational system.

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