



Methods and Techniques Used by English Teacher Educators in Nepal

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Abstract

This qualitative research study aims to explore methods and techniques used by teacher educators in Nepalese English Language Teaching (ELT) contexts. Four teacher educators from two campuses of Rupandehi district of Nepal were selected purposively. Open-ended questions were used to collect information from the participants. The results of the study reveals that grammar translation method (GTM), audio-lingual method and communicative language teaching (CLT) were three major methods like-wise, role play, group and pair work techniques were found to be used frequently used in the ELT class rooms by teacher educators. The study reveals positive perception of teachers towards the methods and techniques used by them. It also shows the necessity of eclectic method with the idea that no method or technique is the best and worst in English language teaching.

Introduction

English language teaching methodology has drastically changed over the last two decades along with the invention of many new methods and techniques. One method came out as a reaction to another claiming the best one in methods-era. Nothing is permanent but everything goes on changing. English language teaching has undergone tremendous changes over the years, especially the last two decades. The English language education was introduced into classes at schools centuries ago. Freeman, (2008) asserts that academic qualification alone may not help teachers to grow professionally, on the other hand, they need to be equipped themselves with the current practices. No method has been a panacea for the solution of the ELT problems. At present, the era of method is over and the ELT as of the current scenario is in “post method thinking”. Kumaravadivelu, (2006) suggests what needed is not alternative method, but it is an alternative to method. This statement is also in favour of post method pedagogy. Today, the language is the most widely learned second language in the world. The ancient period between the 14th and late 19th century is regarded as pre-method era. In this period, methods did not present clear-cut and distinct procedures to each other. Several challenges have emerged in conventional teaching methods due to numerous limitations. In fact, dramatic changes have taken place in the field of language teaching due to the modern trends and innovation (Kessler, 2018; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Ellis, 2010; Altbach et al., 2009). The art of teaching was largely dependent upon the skill and ability of the practitioners as they had to use their cognition, logics and experiences in teaching.

Many methods have been introduced and substituted by the new ones from the use of classical methods to modern current communicative methods. Richards and Rodgers (2001) state, “The history of language teaching in the last hundred years has been distinguished by a search for more operative ways of teaching the second or foreign languages” (p.vii) During the last ten decades, a search for more effective way of teaching second or foreign language has gone through a numerous changes and innovations along with the adoption of new teaching

approaches and methods. It is therefore, the packaged solutions to language teaching prescribed by the particular approaches and methods used in particular situations are unlikely to fit everywhere. In one hand, all the teachers are not equally competent enough to understand the application of methods and on the other hand, learners' contexts, needs and interest are not the same everywhere.

The use of appropriate methods and techniques of English language teaching is worthy for effective and efficient teaching and learning. It is an integral part of language teaching. Appropriate method in ELT is unavoidable to create opportunities to learners for creative and effective learning. It is inappropriate to teach only through one particular method. However, many English language teachers are still using solely the text books and grammar translation method for teaching and learning English. I also believe this research study will be a milestone in uncovering methods and techniques used by teacher educators in ELT classrooms. Future researchers and teachers will get benefit from it and improve their teaching and learning situation in the 21st century to enhance their proficiency in English language teaching and learning.

In my understanding, the English teacher educators in Nepalese classrooms are still using traditional mode of teaching. They use traditional methods in teaching English rather modern methods and techniques. In the early days of my teaching, I also did not use and engage my students with student centred methods. Nepal government has changed the English curriculum since 2015. However, there is no significant evidence that reveals improved learner achievement. Most of the teacher educators are found not using student centred methods and techniques for efficacy and efficiency of learning English. So, the students are not getting opportunities in learning English. Nevertheless, very few English teachers now have been using student centred methods and techniques to facilitate their learners in learning English in Nepalese contexts.

Based on my experience of teaching graduate and post graduate students for years, I am concerned that many of the teachers teaching English whom I interacted and observed with, are not using learner-entered instruction in the way it should have been used. I believe student centred methods and techniques can change the role of a teacher from knowledge provider to facilitator by shifting modality of teaching-learning where students take charge of their own learning. Literature supports use and the need of student centred methods and techniques in teaching and learning English. But my experience shows it is less practiced in ELT classrooms. It is not adequately addressed, explored and understood so far in Nepalese context. Despite its efficiency and the effectiveness of student centred methods and techniques in schools, English teachers are reluctant to use eclectic methods. Therefore, I decided to choose this issue as my research agenda.

The purpose of the study is to explore commonly and frequently used methods and techniques by teacher educators in face to face mode of ELT classrooms and explore their perception on them. The research study aims to investigate how the English teacher educators teach in face to face mode in classroom, how the teacher educators perceive frequently used methods and techniques.

English Language Teaching Methods and Techniques

Regarding the needs and demands of the local contexts and concerns, methods are more theoretical and far from the classroom use and context, as a matter of fact, they cannot bring any qualitative change in language teaching. Since they are more prescriptive, they impose theories rather than freedom and autonomy both for the teachers and learners. Brown, (2007)

states ESL/EFL teachers and trainees will welcome this methodology text, which considers all practical classroom techniques and activities in terms of solid foundation stones of research on second language acquisition Method in EFL involves assumptions or theories about language and language dictating different aspects of teaching and learning practices. Teachers and learners were regarded as the slaves of methods because they minimized their own voice and interests during teaching and learning activities and practices.

Prabhu (1990) states three possible explanations of the statement are discussed, based on a broad interpretation of the term method: (a) that different methods are best for different teaching contexts; (b) that all methods are partially true or valid; and (c) that the notion of good and bad methods is itself misguided. Techniques are the activities which are used in the classroom to achieve immediate goals of teaching and learning. There are two types of techniques. They are: Teacher centred and student centred. Lecture, explanation, illustration, demonstration are the teacher centred techniques whereas pair/group work, dramatization/role play tasks, project work, discovery and questioning are learner centre techniques. Teacher centred techniques provide few opportunities for the learners to participate in the learning activities and tasks as they provide no concern with the individual differences of learners whereas learner centred techniques provide enough opportunities for the learners to participate in the learning activities and tasks as they concern with the individual differences of learners and they take charge of their own learning. Elen et al., (2007) state in students' minds student-centredness and teacher-centredness seem to be mutually reinforcing features of high quality education. Nagaraju et al., (2013) state these activities bring some advantages to students such as when students are working together in English they talk more, share their ideas, learn from each other, feel more secure and less anxious, and use English in a meaningful way.

The reviewed research studies explored the use of common and frequently used methods and techniques in ELT classrooms in the globe. Those studies reflected on their respective contexts and most of them were quantitative in nature. Therefore, the gap I found here is no qualitative researches have been conducted and documented yet to explore teacher educators' understanding in the use of methods and techniques in Nepalese context. The available research studies are silent on these issues. So, my research study is different from others. Through this research work, I intend to fill the gap because there is a strong need of communicative methods and techniques in ELT to make teaching and learning effective.

Methods

In order to explore teacher educators' understanding and practices of methods and techniques in English classes, I selected four teacher educators from two campuses of Rupandehi district, Nepal purposively as research participants and site to have the required information. I adopted the qualitative research design to generate meaning and analyze it. As teaching and learning is a procedure in which both social-interactions and mental processes have an interchangeable relationship; ethnography sounds the most appropriate and relevant approach for this research topic. Direct observation and in-depth interview were used as the techniques for collecting information from the research participants. Data collection took approximately 4 weeks. EFL teacher educators who participated in the study were observed in their teaching and were asked to answer a list of semi-structured interview questions that allowed them to elaborate on their teaching methods and techniques. In order to supplement audio recordings were used as data collecting tools in both observation and interview sessions that consumed 30 to 40 minutes. I translated the recorded information into English from Nepali. Then I organized and categorized the information into different themes with sub-themes and analyzed and interpreted it. I recorded their views taking consent from them and protected privacy and secrecy using their

pseudonyms. Moreover, I tried to involve the participants who were more experienced teachers in the class.

Results and Discussion

Data obtained from the in-depth interview of participant teachers were analyzed and interpreted under different sub headings as follows.

Maximum Use of Teacher-centered Methods and Techniques

Teacher-centred methods and techniques were commonly used by Nepalese teacher educators. But in a teacher-centred environment, students learn very little. It is not uncommon for teachers to lecture. In teacher-centred setting a teacher acts as if he or she is the experts with all of the answers which discourages student's collaboration and leaves complete authority in the hands of the teacher educators. In a teacher-centred way of teaching which is one of the traditional ways of teacher-centred way of teaching. Teacher educator 2 said,

“When I want to involve them in interaction, only talented students take part but others remain passive. Therefore I usually use lecture and explanation methods and techniques as it is easier to complete the course in time and a large class can be effectively be managed”

The lived experience of teacher educator 2 reveals the drawbacks of learner centred methods when he involves them in interaction, only talented students take part in the activities but average learners remain passive. He claims that lecture and explanation methods and techniques are easier as they support to complete the course in time and a large class can also be effectively be managed.

Effective and Frequently Used Methods and Techniques

Almost all the teacher participants in my study revealed that they are many changes in English practices. Grammar translation method (GTM), audio-lingual method and communicative language teaching (CLT), are the frequently used common methods. Like-wise, brain storming, role play, lecture and group work techniques were found to be used frequently in ELT classrooms. Majority of the teacher educators used lecture, role-play that engaged students in the lesson content. Brain storming, pair-work, group-work, project work, problem solving tasks are the preferred techniques used in their classes. These types of activities provide students more opportunities to communicate and use the language. In this context, Teacher educator 3 said,

“When I was a novice teacher, I felt easier when I used teacher centred methods and techniques. But after getting training, I started involving learners in interaction by group work, project work and questioning”.

It is understandable teacher as facilitator for the learners, can use learner-cantered methods to facilitate the students in different activities. It enhances teaching and learning creating a learner-centred atmosphere. It enhances teaching skills of teachers and transforms the teachers from knowledge provider to facilitator. In this changing scenario, teachers are not changing their roles.

Challenges Encountered by Teacher Educators

Since the classes are crowded, it is complicated to the teachers use learner centred methods and techniques frequently in their classes. Crowded classes and noise were the barriers in the implementation of these methods and techniques. While observing classrooms, group work and role play techniques were not used frequently. They need regular training to use them

effectively. Majority of the teachers said that they were highly in need of technology integration training for its effective implementation in teaching. In this line, Teacher educator 4 said;

“There are more than 80 students in my class. So, I usually use teacher centred methods and techniques so that I can easily control the class and complete the course in time”.

His experience reveals that he has not provided any opportunities for learners to participate in the learning activities and tasks. In such a learning environment, students do not take the responsibility of their learning.

Students’ Cognitive Engagement

The teacher educators engaged their students with the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), which emphasized written language over spoken language. Basic teaching equipment; project work, textbooks, slide presentation by the students were regularly found as part of classroom lessons. During lessons, a demonstration technique of role-playing was used to get students to practice reading and saying (role-playing). Besides amusement, it also brought them self-confidence. Teacher educator 1 said,

“I usually involve my students in student centered methods and techniques. For example, CLT, brain storming, group work, pair work, and project work, problem solving etc. so that they can share the information to each other and learn better. I only facilitate them and make them work giving tasks”

Almost all teacher participants used brain storming, pair-work, project work, problem solving tasks group-work were the most preferred techniques used in their classes. They engage their students in learning many things such as teaching stories, film reviews, advertisements and so forth. Learner centred methods and technique is helping them to make class learner centred-friendly and transform their knowledge into practice. They take charge of their learning as they are motivated for learning. Regarding this, teacher educator 2 said,

“I make my students practice with different learner centred methods and techniques frequently. This has helped me make my teaching efficient and natural. My students can have two way communications. They love interacting to each other as they feel less stress in interacting with pair or groups”

His experience reveals that learner centered techniques helped him to maximize his learners’ engagement in learning such in which they were unfamiliar. Thus, learner centered transformed the level of understanding of both teachers and learners and construct new knowledge as constructivists claim. The learners can acquire the target language easily. They develop learner autonomy. Thus, the traditional mode of content delivery has shifted learner mode of learning where student can achieve a great success in an enjoyable way. In learner centered techniques, learners can enjoy social life in a social like setting doing different social activities by sharing their ideas in a naturally way.

Teacher Educators’ Perception of Methods and Techniques

Almost all teacher educators have perception of more than a dozen of various modern methods and techniques. They want to bring some changes in their teaching. For example: Grammar translation method, the audio-lingual method, communicative language teaching, community language learning and the direct method. However, they do not have the proper individual and social skills and knowledge for designing learner centered tasks, making classroom interactive to handle the class effectively. Teachers had the understanding that no method or technique is unique, original, and universal and the best to all the learners at all times as they have their own pros and cons. Since all methods cannot work in all contexts; the teacher educators should not

take them for granted. Harmer (2011) states that no single teaching method that can possibly 'cure', which means that various teaching methods should be used by teachers to meet needs of all students. Teacher educator 2 Said,

“Learner centered methods are better than teacher centered method as they get opportunity to get input from their friends”.

Almost all the teachers agreed that learner centered methods and techniques can help teachers make classroom teaching more practical and sustainable. Both teachers and students can collaborate and interact with each other. In addition, it assists to make teaching learning activities interesting. The teacher educators engaged their students with the grammar translation method (GTM), which emphasized written language over spoken language. During lessons, a demonstration technique of role-playing was used to get students to practice reading and saying (role-playing). Besides amusement, it also brought them self-confidence. Teacher educator 4 said,

“CLT, Role play, group work, project works are very useful techniques to maximize student talking time. They also increase their creativity and engagement in ELT class. They provide them chance to develop social tasks”.

TE4's experience reveals his perception of methods and techniques. He is familiar with both learner centered and student centered methods and techniques. He believes CLT, group work, project work task-based learning, CLL and CALL engage learners in learning.

Conclusion

The study reveals that grammar translation method (GTM), audio-lingual method and communicative language teaching (CLT), and problem solving methods are the frequently used common methods. Like-wise, brain storming, role play, lecture, group work and project work techniques were found to be used frequently in ELT classrooms. These types of activities provide more opportunities to the students to communicate and use the language. The study also reveals positive perception of teachers towards the methods and techniques that they use frequently. However, crowded classes, and noise were the barriers in the implementation of these methods and techniques. While observing classrooms, group work, role play and project techniques were not used frequently as they reported in the interview. During the interviews, the teacher educators responded differently than they actually did in real classrooms. Since one-size fits-all approach of teaching model might not work in all the situations, the teacher educators should use learner-centered methods and techniques to involve the learners in learning. Anxiety free environment should be created with the active participation of the students in the classroom. They need to localize and contextualize their teaching on the basis of needs, demands and backgrounds of the learners from their existing knowledge and experiences. This is a small-scale research study so; it was confined to four English teachers from two campuses of Rupandehi, Nepal, therefore the result cannot be generalized throughout the country.

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