Assessing challenges and strategies to improve speaking English at Tarphel Primary School

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Article Info	**Abstract**
	Educating, learning, communicating, and expressing ideas and knowledge are all possible through language. In Bhutan, English and Dzongkha are used as mediums of instruction in schools. Although English is the medium of instruction, students struggle to communicate in English. Even after the teacher's best efforts, the students are falling behind in their English speaking. As a result, this research aimed to determine the cause of difficulty speaking English, ways to improve, and the best strategies to improve speaking habits. The data were gathered using total population sampling. Open-ended questionnaires were used to collect data. The findings showed that students have difficulty speaking English as a result of a number of factors, including linguistic factors, psychological factors, and the environment in which they live. The results also showed that level-one assistance, body language, and using different media instruments could improve English speaking skills. Furthermore, the study indicates that group discussion is the most effective strategy for improving speaking skills. This study will be helpful to educators in enhancing their students' English-speaking skills. **Keywords:** Communication, English speaking, strategies, students.

Introduction

Language is an essential component of human communication, with the ability to educate, learn, communicate, and express knowledge and ideas (Wangmo, 2021). According to Norbu & Namgyel (2019), Bhutan has twenty-three spoken languages. From that, the country uses English as classroom instruction. All the subjects are taught in English except Dzongkha (the national language). English is also used in almost all offices in Bhutan (Dendup, 2020; Dorji, 2017).

"In the teaching-learning process, speaking is one of the skills students must master. In order to share their ideas and communicate effectively, students must speak." (Seaborne et al., 2021, cited in Jaina et al., 2022). This rarely happens, especially in the remote schools of the country, where they are less exposed to the environment beyond a particular school. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are four skills in English achievement (Rachman, 2017, as cited in Jaina et al., 2022). The author also mentioned that speaking is considered the most challenging skill to build in the classroom from these four skills.

However, numerous studies have been conducted in a general education context, but very little is now known about speaking English in particular. Despite the teacher's best efforts, the children are falling behind in speaking English. As a result, this research aims to identify the reasons for difficulties in speaking English, as well as methods to improve and assess the best strategies for improving speaking in school.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are to document the cause of difficulty speaking and assess the ways to improve speaking in English. It also analyzes the best strategies to enhance speaking in English.

Literature Review

In Bhutan, English is the official language, along with Dzongkha. It is taught as a primary subject in schools, using it as a medium of instruction for other subjects. English is learnt from Pre-Primary (PP) until college. Despite early exposure to the language, researchers have found that students who graduate from high schools and colleges have weak communicative English skills (LaPrairie, 2013, cited in Dorji, 2017). According to Dendhup & Angkanoa (2020), a student's economic background and parental literacy are related to how well they perform in English. Additionally, Bhutan's teaching and learning practices are more inclined toward the traditional method of rote learning and memorization. Teachers have been delivering lessons and imparting knowledge and skills using a traditional method of direct instruction. Dendhup & Angkanoa (2020) also mentioned that traditional teaching methods hardly use innovative teaching techniques, and instructional practices are not constructive and have resulted in poor student English skills.

Thinley & Maxwell (2013) claimed that despite English's rising status and popularity, little research had been done on the effects of using it in schools as a language of access to oral literature or on its cultural and aesthetic values. It was crucial to investigate how English teachers and students saw the subject's function in the context of their academic and pedagogical experiences.

Challenges in Teaching English

According to Abrar et al. (2018), students' lack of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation results in their inability to speak English fluently. Students are afraid to speak English because they are afraid of making mistakes in grammar and pronunciation, which can lead to a lack of confidence in speaking English.

As per Dendup (2020), grammar is an essential component of any language, and effective language learning necessitates a thorough understanding of the target language's grammar. Dendup (2020) also stated that students are falling behind in the subject, and English teachers in Bhutan lack confidence in teaching grammar and regard English as a more challenging and complicated subject.

As per Islam et al. (2022), the main issues that learner-speakers face (as cited in Thornbury (2005) are divided into two categories: knowledge factors and skills factors. The knowledge factors are the speaker's linguistic knowledge for oral production. The skill factors indicate

that the learners' knowledge is not automatic enough to ensure fluency. As a result, English speakers must be fluent in the language. They should understand the purpose of speaking, whether it is a transactional or interpersonal function. Second, the speakers must be competent in discourse, which governs the ability to connect and organize individual utterances.

Third, learners require pragmatic competence concerning a specific language, the contexts in which it is used, and the purpose for which it is used. Finally, English speakers should speak grammatically correct English, have a diverse vocabulary, and have good pronunciation.

Islam et al. (2022) also state that lack of self-confidence, shyness to perform speaking, lack of speaking practice, time management, speaking material, and exposure are some of the problems of speaking English.

Intervention to improve speaking in English

Teacher Talk

One way to influence students' speaking abilities is through teacher discourse as a learning input (Syaepul Uyun, 2022). The language variety used by the teacher to give instructions during learning is known as "teacher talk". *Teacher talk* is a unique communicative practice that allows teachers to communicate with students while improving their foreign language skills. When teachers talk to students to see if they understand, they are not only providing a subject lesson, but they are also most likely providing a life lesson (Namaziandost et al., 2019).

Discussion and Classroom Interaction

Discussion is one of the most effective methods for increasing students' fluency and confidence in speaking. Teachers may spend more time speaking to their students in the classroom, but students also require opportunities to improve their English language skills (Chooma et al., 2022). It would be beneficial to incorporate a variety of discussion tasks during an English language class to allow students to participate by sharing their thoughts, expressing their knowledge, and connecting with teachers and other class participants, as this is critical for improving students' fluency (Mohammed et al., 2021).

Debate is the best alternative. It can assist students in explaining and justifying their concepts in English. In recent years, classroom interaction has been regarded as a strategy in the field of second language acquisition because it necessitates the participation of at least two students who collaborate in face-to-face interaction when using a language in an actual situation. We can see that classroom interaction is one of the critical methods by which learners elicit information fields (Mohammed et al., 2021).

Oral Presentation, role play and reporting

The oral presentation can help students practice speaking skills for classroom communication. It can help to improve communication skills and self-confidence so that you can interact fluently (Chien et al., 2020). Role-playing in English language classes is another

instructional strategy that has been recognized as essential for addressing the problem of learners' lack of competency and enhancing their communication skills (Larson et al., 2020).

Another way could be reporting the article read in the classroom. Students are required to read a newspaper or magazine before class, and in class, they describe to their classmates what they believe to be the most exciting news. Students could discuss whether they have had any interesting events in their daily lives that they would like to share with their classmates. As a result, it can help to increase fluency in speaking English (Mohammed et al., 2021)**.**

Research Question

What are the causes of difficulty in speaking English, ways to improve, and examine the best strategies to enhance speaking?

Methodology

Study Area

Quantitative research method was used in this study which aims to improve the strategies used by middle school students for speaking English. The research was conducted at Tarphel Primary School in Boomdelling Gewog, Trashi Yangtse Dzongkhag. The school is situated on 5 acres of land at an elevation of approximately 2117 meters above sea level, making it one of the most remote schools in the Dzongkhag, with no road access (Tarphel Primary School, 2022).

There are 96 students, 54 boys and 42 girls, and 19 faculty members at the school (8 teachers and 11 support staff). The school has boarding facilities for students in grades PP through VI, most coming from the borders. A small number of day students who live nearby attend the school. Most students come from low-income families, with their parents being illiterate peasants.

Sampling Methods

Total population sampling (TPS) from the purposive sampling technique is used to collect the data. TPS is a method in which the entire population that satisfies the requirements is included in the study. When the number of cases being investigated is small, total population sampling is more commonly used (Etikan, 2016).

Research Procedures

This research employed a five-level Likert-scale questionnaire. The questionnaire is divided into three parts. In the first part, the causes of difficulty in speaking English related to linguistic, psychological, and environmental factors are determined. In this research, factors such as insufficient vocabulary, poor English grammar, and difficulty in evaluating their linguistic ability to speak English were mentioned by Shen & Chiu (2019).

In the second part of the questionnaire, the data were collected to determine the strategies to enhance the English-speaking culture. Level one [L1] support, body language, educational media tools, and self-upgrading were all used in this section (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Razmjoo et al., 2011; Knapp & Hall, 2006). Several factors are used to access the L1

assistance, including comprehending the other person's words in L1 before responding, organizing thoughts in L1, translating from English into L1, and writing down responses in L1. In order to improve English speaking techniques, body language was assessed using gestures, eye contact, and facial expression. Similar to this, reading English texts, novels, and magazines, using English transition words and synonyms, and memorization of English daily dialogues were all used to find speaking strategies. Additionally, strategies for self-upgrading included speaking English in class, practicing speaking out loud in English, talking to oneself in English, and conversing with teachers in English.

Will role-playing, group discussions, storytelling, and singing English songs be able to improve their English-speaking strategies? Other context-specific dichotomous questions were used in the questionnaire's final section to determine the best strategies.

Data collection and analysis

Students were made to gather in a multi-purpose hall. The questionnaires were projected and explained with the help of L1 assistance to avoid linguistic barriers. The students were then asked to complete the questionnaires. A Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. The analysis focused on "strongly agree" and "agree" to identify the challenges and solutions. The data and the findings were presented as frequency and percentage.

Results

Factors causing difficulty in Speaking English

The linguistic factors that cause difficulty in speaking English are shown in Table 1. It was discovered that most students (53.7%) agreed that insufficient vocabulary was the primary cause of difficulty speaking English. It was followed by insufficient sentence organization (48.8%) and insufficient grammar (46.3%). However, talking intermittently (31.7%) and insufficient expression (29.3%) are minor factors contributing to difficulty in speaking English.

Table 1. Linguistic Factors that Cause Difficulty in Speaking English

Linguistic factor	SA		A		N		DA		SDA	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Insufficient Vocabulary	6	14.6	22	53.7	4	9.8	5	12.2	4	9.8
Insufficient Grammar	4	9.8	19	46.3	9	22.0	8	19.5	1	2.4
Inaccurate Pronunciation	11	26.8	15	36.6	10	24.4	3	7.3	2	4.9
Insufficient Expression	5	12.2	14	34.1	7	17.1	12	29.3	3	7.3

	5	12.2	11	26.8	11	26.8	13	31.7	1	2.4
Talking intermittently										
Insufficient Sentence Organization	7	17.1	20	48.8	7	17.1	7	17.1	0	0.0

Table 2 showed that 34.1% of the respondents strongly agreed that fear of making mistakes was the cause of difficulty in speaking English. Timidity and low volume (24.4%) were other factors that the student strongly agreed were the cause of difficulty in speaking. Nevertheless, stuttering has little effect on English speaking abilities.

Table 2. Psychological Factors that Cause Difficulty in Speaking English

Psychological factors	SA		A		N		DA		SDA	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Fear of making mistakes	14	34.1	12	29.3	5	12.2	7	17.1	3	7.1
Peer pressure	4	9.8	16	39.0	9	22.0	9	22.0	3	2.4
Nervousness	7	17.1	13	31.7	10	24.4	9	22.0	2	4.9
Stuttering	5	12.2	8	19.5	12	29.3	15	36.6	1	2.4
Lack of confidence	6	14.6	16	39.0	7	17.1	10	24.4	1	4.9
Worries about not being understood	8	19.5	14	34.1	6	14.6	9	22.0	4	9.8
Timidity and low volume	10	24.4	5	12.2	10	24.4	12	29.3	4	9.8

Infrequent English conversation (48.8%, n = 20) was the most significant cause of the difficulties in speaking English in the learning environment factor. The children feel that frequent English communication will help them overcome language hurdles. The students also agreed that low classroom participation (29.3%, n = 12) prevents English speaking practices. In contrast, it was shown that inadequate support (39%, n = 16) had less influence on English-speaking culture.

Table 3. Learning Environment Factors that Cause Difficulty in Speaking English among Students

Learning environment	SA		A		N		DA		SDA	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Infrequent English conversation	6	14.6	20	48.8	5	12.2	7	17.1	3	7.1
Insufficient support	2	4.9	3	7.3	9	22.0	16	39.0	11	26.8
Insufficient resources	6	14.6	9	22.0	6	14.6	15	36.6	5	12.2

Low participation in the class	5	12.2	12	29.3	8	19.5	14	34.1	2	4.9

Strategies to improve English-speaking habits

Level one [L1] assistant is an approach in which students understand the conversation using their language. It may assist students in arranging their thoughts in Dzongkha and conveying them in English. Table findings revealed that (56.1%, *n* = 23) of participants felt that organizing ideas with L1 aid may help them enhance their English-speaking abilities. Furthermore, interpreting other people's words with L1 before responding can help them improve their English-speaking abilities. As indicated in table 4, students (34.1%, *n* = 14) highly agreed that writing down replies in L1 can increase their speaking ability.

Table 4. L1 Assistant Used by the Students as a Means to İmprove Speaking in English

Level 1 assistant	SA		A		N		DA		SDA	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Understanding the other person's words with L1 before answering	11	26.8	20	48.8	5	12.2	5	12.2	0	0.0
Organising ideas with L1	7	17.1	23	56.1	3	7.3	4	9.8	4	9.8
Translating English into L1	8	19.5	15	36.6	12	29.3	4	9.8	2	4.9
Writing down responses in L1	14	34.1	18	43.9	5	12.2	4	9.8	0	0.0

Body language is essential in improving speaking abilities. As demonstrated in table 5, 26.8% of respondents strongly agreed that gestures help enhance speaking abilities. Furthermore, facial expressions and eye contact can drive students to improve their English communication skills. The findings imply that body language can help students talk more effectively.

Table 5. Body Language Used to İmprove Speaking Strategies

Body Language	SA		A		N		DA		SDA	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Gesture	11	26.8	14	34.1	11	26.8	5	12.2	0	0.0
Eye Contacts	5	12.2	13	31.7	11	26.8	5	12.2	7	17.1
Facial Expression	9	22.0	5	12.2	17	41.5	8	19.5	2	4.9

Most students (34.1%, *n* = 14) agreed that reading English texts, novels, and magazines may help them enhance their English-speaking abilities (Table 6). Furthermore, remembering everyday dialogues in English and watching English movies can help improve speaking skills (26.8%, *n* = 11). Nevertheless, using synonyms and transition words in English has low expression (14.6%, *n* = 6).

Table 6. Educational/Media İnstrument as a Means to İmprove Speaking Skills

Educational/ Media Instruments	SA		A		N		DA		SDA	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Watching English movies	11	26.8	21	51.2	4	9.8	4	9.8	1	2.4
Reading English texts, novels, and magazines	14	34.1	21	51.2	1	2.4	3	7.3	2	4.9
Using synonyms and transition words in English	6	14.6	20	48.8	10	24.4	4	9.8	1	2.4
Memorizing the daily dialogues in English	11	26.8	19	46.3	4	9.8	5	12.2	2	4.9

Table 7 shows how the participants in this study applied the "Self-upgrading" strategy to enhance their English-speaking abilities. Most students agreed that conversation with teachers in English is a means to improve speaking strategies (58.5%, *n* = 24). They also agreed that practicing thinking aloud in English, practicing talking to oneself in English, and having a conversation in English in class can have a positive effect on improving English speaking (46.3%, *n* = 19, 43.9%, *n* = 18, and 46.3%, *n* = 19) respectively.

Table 7. Self Upgrading as a Means to İmprove English-Speaking Strategies

Self-Upgrading	SA		A		N		DA		SDA	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Conversation to teachers in English	14	34.1	24	58.5	1	2.4	2	4.9	0	0.0
Practicing of thinking aloud in English	14	34.1	19	46.3	6	14.6	2	4.9	0	0.0
Practicing of talking oneself in English	7	17.1	18	43.9	8	19.5	5	12.2	3	7.3
Having conversation in English in the class	13	31.7	19	46.3	7	17.1	1	2.4	1	2.4

Best Strategies to enhance speaking English

As shown in Table 8, most respondents (97.6%) prefer group discussion to enhance their speaking skills. Moreover, the delivery of the topic and the students' agility in using language improve the students' vocabulary in speaking skills. The role play strategy consists of 78%, which is the lowest in strategies for improving their speaking skills.

Table 8. Best Strategies to Enhance Speaking Skills in English

Strategies	In percent (%)	
	Yes	No
Do you think role play will enhance your speaking skills?	78.0	22.0
Do you think small group discussion will enhance your speaking skills?	97.6	2.40
Do you think story-telling will enhance your speaking skills?	87.8	12.2
Do you think singing English songs will enhance your speaking skills?	90.2	9.80

Discussion

This study deals with factors causing the difficulty in speaking English, strategies to improve and English-speaking habits.The discussion process in the light of the results obtained from the findings is as follows.   A similar study by Chema et al. (2022) highlighted that a lack of vocabulary was an apparent cause of anxiety when learning to speak English. Ahmed et al. (2017), also concluded that when other students in class laugh at them because of their poor sentence organization and structure, it hinders them from speaking English. The study also pointed out that insufficient grammar causes anxiety in students when speaking. Difficulty in speaking English due to insufficient grammar or lack of grammar was also pointed out in research carried out by Chema et al. (2022). The same author found that fear of making mistakes affects students speaking English.

Dalem (2017) also claims that students' poor English-speaking skills are the key reason for their low participation in class. The same author suggests that many students feel they cannot speak English well and that their English is poor. The lack of encouragement from the teacher, which ultimately results in difficulty speaking English, is the other factor contributing to pupils' low involvement in class. In addition, Heriansyah (2012) noted that low or uneven participation is one of the factors that contribute to English language speaking difficulty. To be heard, only one member can speak at a time, which results in extremely little speaking time for each person in a vast group. The tendency of sure students to dominate while others talk very little or hardly at all exacerbates this issue.

Moreover, Marzuk (2022) stated that fear of being teased by classmates and mispronouncing English words is a factor causing difficulty in speaking English. Furthermore, Ruzigul (2022), in his study, also stated shyness to be the most significant psychological component that affects their capacity to talk and hinders them from speaking effectively without any distracting pauses.

One of the leading causes of the inability to speak English is a lack of strategic communication proficiency (Putri et al., 2020). Moreover, Tika et al. (2021) also noted in their research that many students struggled to communicate effectively in English because most pupils barely used it.

In a similar study, Shen & Chiu (2019) reported that successful English learners used their mother tongue to assist them when expressing their thoughts in English. It was further supported by Karabenick & Noda (2004), stating that with the help of L1 assistance, English language learners develop speaking as well as reading and writing.To help the other person understand what is being said when someone is speaking, body language must be added. In addition to facial expressions, communicating requires hand gestures and posture (Sihotang, 2021). In the same paper, they stated that making eye contact while communicating is crucial. One should constantly maintain eye contact when speaking to others or giving a presentation. This will help to communicate more effectively since it improves other people's faith in the topic.

According to Atmowardoyo & Sakkir (2021), reading books and articles and learning vocabulary in English are some of the most common strategies used by good language learners to improve their speaking skills. Skripsi et al. (2022), also added that it is critical to practice using film media both inside and outside of the classroom in order to improve English skills. Harmer (2008) asserted that teachers are role models and demonstrate a good example of speaking English well and using English correctly. The students will imitate the proper English usage, and they will feel comfortable and motivated to learn English. Furthermore, according to Kayi (2006), students learn to speak the English language by interaction. He also mentioned that communicative language teaching and collaborative learning are suitable for students to learn to speak. Finally, Crisianita & Mandasari (2022) stated that the students' intellectual agility in using language could be increased during the discussion.

Conclusion

The English language has a huge impact and is taught worldwide, but it can be challenging to learn in nations where it is not typically the first language. This applies to students at Tarphel Primary School with no exception. This research examined the students' difficulty in speaking English. It was found that the students face problems speaking English. The data analysis revealed that the student's primary causes of speaking challenges were a lack of vocabulary and the fear of making mistakes while speaking. The psychological factors also played a vital role in difficulties in learning and speaking English, where the students' infrequent conversations in English contributed significantly. Though students face challenges in speaking English, they responded that organizing ideas with L1 assistance, gestures, reading English texts, novels, and magazines, and having English conversations with teachers while speaking English will enhance their English-speaking abilities. According to the students, the most substantial speaking strategy was a group discussion, which improved their English speaking.

Conflict of interests

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

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