The Dynamics of Teachers' Instruction in Nepali Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

Regardless of the significant role of instruction-giving in EFL classrooms in achieving lesson goals, some research in Nepal explores its impact on classroom efficiency and student participation. This paper intends to bridge this research gap by assessing the instructional strategies of English teachers. Conducted in Nepal, the research observed 15 English teachers during their lessons to assess their instruction-giving techniques. Using a mixed-methods approach, data was collected through classroom observations and analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Findings reveal that repetition, board writing of key points, and demonstrations effectively reinforce instructions and aid comprehension. However, challenges remain in optimizing instruction delivery. The paper highlights the need for professional development programs that emphasize repetition, language simplification, visual aids, and demonstrations. These findings can inform teacher training modules, ultimately enhancing classroom management and student learning outcomes. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on instructional strategies in Nepal's EFL/ESL classrooms.

Introduction

Nepal, known for its rich cultural heritage, is one of the most sought-after countries. It is renowned for its diverse and vibrant population that embraces a wide range of religions and traditions (The Fascination Cultural Diversity of Nepal, 2019). Nepal is often categorized within the Expanding Circle, as English has traditionally held no official status in the country. However, the language has played significant economic, educational, and social roles in society, much like it does in Outer Circle English-speaking countries (Pandey, 2020).

The global expansion and increasing use of English have led to a significant shift from teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to teaching it as an international language (EIL) (Rose & Montakantiwong, 2018). Effective instruction-giving is essential in EFL/ESL classrooms, significantly influencing students' language acquisition and overall academic success (Angulo, 2023). In Nepal, where English proficiency is increasingly important, mastering instruction-giving nuances has become more critical than ever. Previous studies have highlighted the

pivotal role of clear instructions in driving positive learning outcomes in EFL environments. For instance, El Kemma (2019) emphasized how well-crafted instructions can boost student engagement and language development, while Sowell (2017) pointed out that unclear instructions can lead to the failure of classroom activities. Supporting this view, Riwayatiningsih (2024) stated "Teachers who use clear, concise, and accessible language can significantly enhance understanding and engagement, making learning more effective" (p. 138). In EFL settings, teachers are required to give detailed and intended instruction to avoid ambiguity and fear in students.

Instruction involves planning and organizing teaching and learning activities, integrating elements such as teachers, students, materials, and the learning environment (El Kemma, 2019). However, this study shifts the focus to how teachers deliver instructions for classroom activities. By examining these practices within a Nepali school, this research aims to analyze the challenges EFL teachers face and the effective methods they use to guide students. By exploring instruction-giving dynamics, the study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on best practices in EFL teaching, offering practical recommendations for improving instructional strategies in any EFL or ESL settings.

Flow Chart 1:

A general instruction-giving process
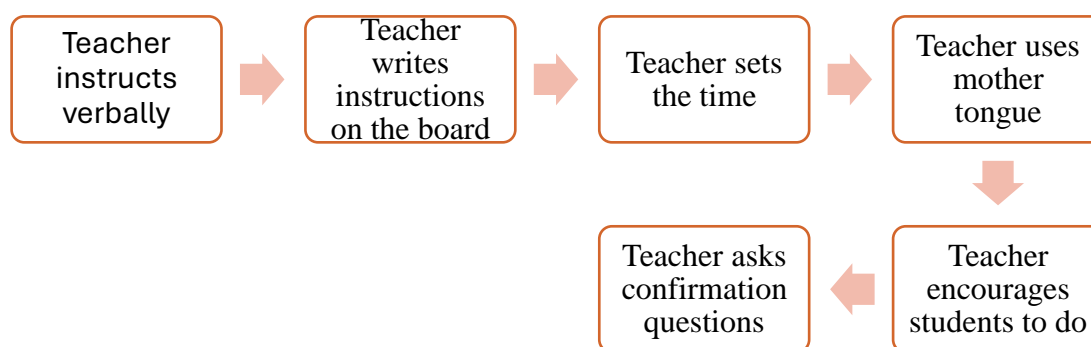
Students in EFL classrooms often encounter significant difficulties when instructions are poorly delivered. A systematic instruction-giving process (Flow Chart 1) can be more effective than just giving verbal or written instruction because our class consists of all types of learners. Miscommunication or unclear guidance can lead to confusion, resulting in students misunderstanding tasks or objectives. This confusion hampers their ability to engage effectively in learning activities, which can diminish their confidence and motivation. Additionally, when instructions are vague or overly complex, students may struggle to follow along, leading to wasted class time and a lack of focus. These challenges not only impede language acquisition but also contribute to a sense of frustration and disengagement, ultimately affecting their overall academic success and progress in mastering English.

Despite the fact that there are a lot of studies on effective classroom teaching and improving classroom teaching with technological aids, research on the quality of instruction-giving still remains very limited. While most studies have concentrated on the integration of L1, technology, projects, drills, plays, and other hands-on activities in EFL classes, little attention has been paid to how Nepal's English teachers are improving their instruction-giving in English. This gap has left a significant part of English language teaching unexplored because the value

of English Medium Instruction (EMI) and English language proficiency is increasing in Nepal. This study can offer practical suggestions for enhancing teachers' instruction-giving and maximizing students' learning outcomes by filling such a gap in Nepal's context.

Literature Review

EFL teachers must grapple with a lot of challenges in their classrooms. All age group learners may have some sources of fear. Phuong and Bau (2024) emphasize that anxiety among adult learners comes from the idea of being backward in class, hesitation to converse in English, and a fear of making grammatical errors. New EFL teachers have more challenges to deal with than experienced ones. Amin and Rahimi (2018) clarify that managing classes, executing a curriculum that aligns with the class levels and duration, adopting contextual teaching approaches, and familiarizing themselves with teacher rights and regulations are major challenges. Heng et al. (2023) argue that teachers designing a wide range of levels that achieve the goals using the same materials and inflexible lesson plans disallow them from customizing them for students' needs.

EFL teachers should adopt different strategies based on class needs and students' abilities. Malik et al. (2020) found that EFL teachers use teaching techniques such as learning, flash card exchange, drawing games, guessing games, miming games, and topical discussion in Indonesia. There are also other classroom strategies that EFL teachers can apply. Direct instruction, small groups, role-play, etc., are helpful in teaching-learning (Hayat et al., 2021). Oktavia et al. (2021 suggest games, songs, practice, and memorizing as fun teaching strategies for young students. Every classroom has a different context. So, different EFL teachers are expected to adopt different techniques to cater to their needs. A one-size-fits-all idea is detrimental to teaching. EFL teachers' challenges are varied, and different approaches are necessary to achieve classroom goals.

In educational settings, the concept of instruction is multifaceted, encompassing the strategies teachers use to guide students effectively. Research has highlighted the important impact of direct instruction on students' self-regulated learning (Asaro-Saddler & Saddler, 2010; Graham et al., 2005; Lam, 2014; Teng & Zhang, 2019). Magno and Lizada (2015) state that instructions are verbal or written orders integral to teaching strategies. Spratt et al. (2005) emphasize that instruction involves guiding learners through various stages of a lesson, while Margaretha and Wacana (2015) stress that clear instructions are crucial for student success, as misunderstandings can lead to students falling behind. The process of instruction-giving typically involves three stages: preparation, delivery, and post-delivery. During the preparation stage, teachers meticulously plan how to communicate instructions, considering the appropriate language and examples to ensure clarity (El, 2019; Woodberry & Aldrich, 2000). Scrivener (2005) advises simplifying language to enhance student comprehension, emphasizing that concise instructions are more effective.

In the delivery stage, capturing students' attention is critical. Strategies such as ringing a bell, clapping hands, or using cue phrases like "Time to start" or "Listen up" can be effective (Wulandari, 2017; Sowell, 2017). Holmes (2014) identifies three types of directives for delivering instructions: imperatives, interrogatives, and declaratives, with imperatives being the most efficient due to their brevity. Additionally, techniques such as repetition, demonstration, time limits, and using the student's native language are essential for effective instruction (Sowell, 2017). Moreover, "Modeling is a teaching strategy where the learners are shown by their teachers in a clear and detailed manner on how they will complete their tasks" (Esparrago-

Kalidas et al., 2023). Dang and Nguyen (2024) claim that language proficiency improves based on teachers' teaching methods applied in class in the EMI context.

Post-delivery, it's crucial to ensure that all students understand the instructions. Harmer (2007) highlights the importance of checking comprehension through methods beyond simply asking, "Do you understand?" Effective strategies include inviting a student to explain the task or having someone demonstrate it (Harmer, 2007; El, 2019). Missteps in the order or clarity of instructions can lead to confusion and hinder learning (Loaiza & Zean, 2023). This revision condenses the key points about instructional strategies, focusing on clarity, planning, and ensuring student comprehension for successful educational outcomes.

Previous scholarship has explored instructional strategies; however, some research gaps and contradictions exist. Scholars such as (Sowell (2017) and Holmes (2014) are inclined to directive-based instructions such as imperatives, repetition, and modeling. On the other hand, scholars such as Oktavia et al. (2021) recommend interactive and learner-centered approaches including games and songs. Moreover, Harmer (2007) and El (2019) stress the importance of post-delivery comprehension tests. However, there is very limited study on how EFL teachers customize such strategies for multicultural classrooms in Nepal. Heng et al. (2023) present that rigid lesson plans impede the process of instruction-giving in class. A clear classification of instruction-giving techniques, such as repetition for reinforcement, modeling for demonstration, and imperative instruction for clarity, tends to offer a more insightful understanding of effective teaching strategies, addressing inconsistencies in existing scholarship on instruction-giving in EFL contexts.

Factors Influencing Instruction-Giving in EFL Classrooms

Şen (2021) suggests that teachers' approach when giving instructions in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms varies widely. Sherma (2024) claims that professional teachers are always on the lookout for substituting their old-fashioned method of teaching. The factors influencing these variations can be grouped into five categories: activity-based, instruction-based, student-based, syllabus timing, and teacher-based factors. The complexity and importance of a given activity directly influence how instructions are delivered. When students encounter new or unfamiliar activities, teachers often slow down and use modeling techniques to ensure that instructions are clear and understood before the activity begins. Instructions that are lengthy, complicated, or involve unfamiliar topics or formats pose significant challenges. Such instructions often require teachers to spend additional time clarifying, paraphrasing, simplifying, and monitoring to ensure that students understand. This is especially true when instructions involve unfamiliar vocabulary or are presented in an unclear manner.

Student motivation and proficiency levels also play a critical role in instruction-giving. Understanding the specific motivational factors identified by students can inform instructional strategies aimed at enhancing engagement and enthusiasm in writing classes (Sherma, 2023). Similarly, Weinstein and Andrew (2007) note that inattentive or easily distracted students can complicate the process. Conversely, teachers may assume that more advanced students will easily understand instructions, often leading to less emphasis on checking for comprehension. The pace of the syllabus can impact how thoroughly instructions are checked. Due to time constraints, teachers may sometimes skip verifying that students fully understand the instructions, depending on how quickly they need to progress through the syllabus.

The language used for instruction is a significant factor. While it can be seen as an effective strategy to use the target language, especially for advanced students, this approach can be challenging for beginners (Liruso & de Debat, 2003). The choice between using the mother

tongue or the target language for instructions is a common dilemma among EFL teachers. Another critical factor is teacher fatigue. The heavy workload often leaves teachers with limited time to thoroughly prepare or assess their instructional methods. Fatigue can also lead to neglecting to review instructions, which can result in students not fully understanding what they are expected to do. By recognizing and addressing these activity-based, instruction-based, student-based, syllabus timing, and teacher-based factors, teachers can improve their ability to give clear and effective instructions, thereby creating a more conducive learning environment.

Research Questions

To analyze the challenges EFL teachers face and the effective methods they use to guide students, the research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What specific strategies are EFL teachers at a Nepali school currently using to give instructions in the classroom?

2. How effectively are these instructional strategies being implemented in EFL classrooms at the school?

Research Methodology

This study was conducted at a Nepali school, where the focus is on teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to students who are non-English majors. The school aims to equip students with the English communication skills necessary for their careers. The study specifically examines instruction-giving, a critical aspect of classroom management. To support this, the school has organized several workshops to discuss and share strategies and techniques related to instruction-giving.

Data collection

The participants in this study were a diverse group of EFL teachers, ranging from newcomers to those with extensive experience. The researcher knew the school principal but not the teachers. The participants were teaching at different grades ranging from grade 5 to 10. With the school principal's written consent for the observations, ensuring ethical compliance, a total of 15 lessons of 15 teachers were observed at their convenient dates, each during a single 45-minute lesson, to explore how they deliver instructions. The observation process was carried out with the informed consent of the school's Principal, who approved the study beforehand. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to address the research question. The observed lessons ranged from grades 5 to 10 with varying degrees of structure and difficulty based on students' ages rather than their proficiency levels and cultural backgrounds. However, all the lessons followed a general structure of instruction-giving orally and in written format, followed by explanation and clarification. In earlier grades, instructors used simple words, wrote detailed questions, and made gestures. However, in higher grades, teachers wrote instructions concisely and asked them verbally for clarification.

Data analysis

The study employed thematic analysis, a method involving coding and categorization to analyze the qualitative data collected (Creswell, 2011). The instruction's effectiveness in these EFL classrooms was evaluated using an observation checklist adapted from Sowell (Sowell, 2017) and narrative notes. Thematic analysis was chosen because it is a robust qualitative descriptive method that is well-suited for describing the instructional practices of a group of teachers. This

approach aligns with the study's goal of detailing the techniques teachers use to give instructions. Additionally, field notes from the observations were supplemented by recordings, which were transcribed and analyzed to deepen the understanding of instruction-giving practices in this educational context.

For the quantitative analysis, the researcher used frequency counts to assess the existence of specific instructional techniques observed across the 15 lessons. The observation checklist adapted from Sowell (2017) gave an opportunity to collect data, allowing the researcher to compare the data across different teachers and grade levels. Finally, coding schemes were applied to categorize instruction-giving approaches such as repetition, modeling, and imperative instructions.

Results/Findings

Research question 1: *What specific strategies are EFL teachers at a Nepali school currently using to give instructions in the classroom?*

This section presents key findings on the current practices of instruction-giving in EFL classrooms at the Nepali school under study. Teachers at the school employ several effective strategies for delivering instructions. Four notable techniques are the use of time constraints and repetition.

Setting time limits

Setting clear time limits for activities helps students focus and work efficiently. For instance, in a task where students were asked to list materials, Teacher A instructed, "Take three minutes to gather your thoughts." This prompt immediately engaged students, who understood that their progress would be checked after the allotted time.

Repetition

Given that not all students may be fully attentive when instructions are first given, repetition ensures that everyone understands the task. For example, Teacher B reinforced the instruction by saying, "Be silent. You are running out of time. Any answer is acceptable." This repetition clarified the task, whereas in contrast, Teacher C, who did not repeat instructions effectively, saw fewer students respond confidently when asked if they understood.

Affirmative instructions

Teachers who use short, inspiring sentences tend to encourage students effectively. Instructions such as "You can do. Any answer is acceptable." In contrast, overly formal or complex instructions, like those given by Teacher D—"I would like you to pull the words from the essay you read, which are synonymous with them" can confuse students and waste time as they struggle to identify the key points.

Coherent instructions

When an activity requires multiple steps, it is more effective for teachers to break down the instructions rather than delivering them all at once. Using sequential words like "first," "then," "next," and simple connectors like "and," "so," helps students visualize and follow the necessary steps.

Research question 2*: How effectively are these instructional strategies being implemented in EFL classrooms at the school?*

Use of Mother Tongue

To implement class instruction effectively, some teachers at the school resort to using the student's native language to support instruction. Teacher E, for example, used the mother tongue to check for understanding, which was deemed appropriate in that context. However, others, such as Teachers F and G, regularly translated instructions into the native language immediately after giving them in English. This practice stems from concerns that students may not fully grasp English instructions. However, this reliance on translation overlooks the potential for students to understand with the help of visual aids and body language. Additionally, teachers who speak quickly often switch to the mother tongue if their initial instructions in English are unclear, which may undermine students' language learning. Teachers can discuss the meanings of difficult vocabulary in advance.

## Checking for Understanding

Post-instruction, teachers employed various methods to check student comprehension, including asking checking questions, requesting students to summarize or repeat instructions, asking for demonstrations, or, in some cases, not checking at all.

Many teachers used simple questions like "Did I make myself clear?" or "Did you all get it?" to gauge comprehension. However, these questions often went unanswered because students were unclear on the instructions or were too shy or unmotivated to respond. This silence can lead teachers to mistakenly assume that students understand, which may result in confusion and hinder the success of the activity. For example, even when Teacher H used the first language to support the instructions and followed up with "You got it?" students remained unclear about what they needed to do, with some working individually instead of in pairs as required.

On the other hand, teachers who used concise, imperative instructions observed better student comprehension and time efficiency. In contrast, those who used long, academic sentences often faced difficulties as students struggled to understand and follow the instructions, leading to delays and potential confusion. During class observations, some difficulties faced by the teachers were noted.

Bar Chart 1:

Difficulties faced by EFL teachers in a Nepali school

Difficulties faced by EFL teachers in a Nepali school
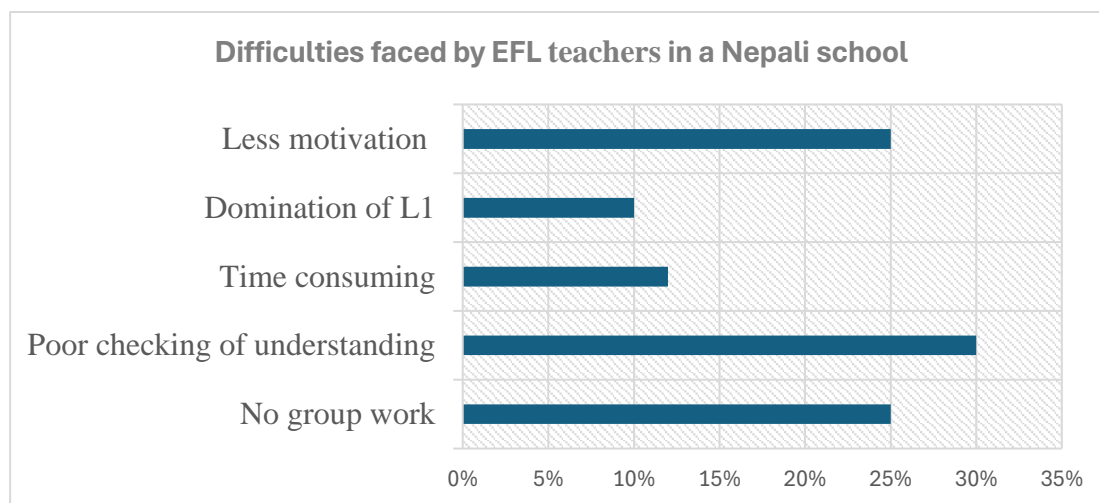
The data (Bar Chart 1) presents challenges encountered by teachers during the instruction-giving process and reveals several critical areas for improvement. Notably, the figures indicate a significant prevalence of issues such as the absence of student grouping before instruction delivery (25%), insufficient checking of students' understanding of concepts (30%), and an alarming neglect of motivation in instruction-giving (25%). Moreover, the misuse of the student's native language (L1) during instruction (10%) suggests potential communication barriers that may hinder effective knowledge transmission. Additionally, the relatively lower percentages of teachers struggling with attention acquisition (8.6%) and time-consuming instruction delivery (12%) underscore the importance of addressing these concerns to optimize the overall teaching and learning experience.

Instructional strategies differed from one teacher to another owing to grade levels among 15 teachers. Even if some teachers used repetition, modeling, and imperative instructions, 30% (5 teachers) did not check student understanding, and 25% (4 teachers) neglected motivation. The percentages in Bar Chart 1 highlight key instructional challenges. For instance, 25% (4 teachers) did not group students, affecting collaboration, while 30% (5 teachers) failed to check comprehension. Additionally, 10% (2 teachers) overused L1, potentially limiting English exposure. Lower percentages, such as attention acquisition (8.6%) and time-consuming instruction (12%), indicate these issues were less prevalent.

Discussion

According to the findings, the teachers used some techniques to make their instructions clear to students. Among the techniques, setting time limits, repetition, affirmative instructions, and coherent instructions were the most common ones. According to Sowell (2017), to instruct students effectively, EFL teachers must adopt strategies such as repetition, demonstration, time limits, and students' native language. The teachers used mother tongue and yes/no questions to gauge the effectiveness of instructional strategies. However, instructors should also think about those students who are reluctant to ask questions or respond to confirmation questions even if they may not have understood the teacher's instructions. In our observation, three problems were very serious: students were less motivated to engage in assignments, poor checking of understanding, and group work. Even if some students miss out on some instructions, group members can tell each other what to do. Even though students clearly understand their teachers' instructions, they may be unwilling to engage in individual or group work. This exactly matches Sherma's (2023) claim that teachers must consider certain motivational factors to engage students in writing activities.

In Nepal, EFL teachers struggle with instruction-giving because some teachers themselves are not good at English. Timsina (2021) stresses that no subject experts or school administrators supervise and guide teachers' delivery if needed. Bhandari and Bhandari (2024) believe that Nepal's classrooms are socially and culturally diverse. Students have different proficiency levels in English. Due to large classroom sizes, teachers are not able to give individual attention to them. Moreover, low-resourced classrooms are a big hindrance to effective instruction-giving. More importantly, most teachers are not well-trained to adopt and adapt their approaches to improving their instruction-giving in EFL contexts.

Some teachers were found using their mother tongue to ensure that their students understood the given instructions. Even if teachers are often discouraged from using their native language in ESL and EFL settings in most places, Sowell (2017) has stressed the need to use a native language, and Scrivener (2005) has emphasized simple and concise language. Simple and

concise language can be a precursor to the use of students' mother tongue when giving instructions in class. Overall, my research findings match Sowell's (2017) emphasis on strategies such as repetition, time check, and positive statements. Nonetheless, Nepali teachers' overuse of L1 in EFL classes supports the traditional EFL agendas. Similarly, my findings resonate with Sherma's (2023) assertion that a lack of motivation threatens teachers' clear classroom commands. Even if previous scholarship has adequately covered class instructional strategies, my studies highlight classroom challenges faced by Nepali teachers, indicating a strong need for more structured comprehension tests and motivational formulas.

Conclusion

Summary

The findings of this study highlight several key aspects of instruction-giving practices in EFL classrooms at a Nepali school. Teachers demonstrate an awareness of the significance of delivering clear instructions and effectively employ strategies such as gaining students' attention, using demonstrations, checking comprehension, and incorporating visual aids. Many teachers strive to deliver concise, straightforward instructions and often use imperative sentences to enhance clarity. However, some challenges persist, particularly regarding the inappropriate use of the mother tongue.

Implications

As Ly (2024) emphasizes English teachers' roles within the classroom to accelerate learning growth, teachers must devise a wide range of tactics, including giving clear and focused instruction. In ESL/EFL contexts, teachers should use both the target language (English) and the native language (Nepali) appropriately for clear instruction. Just asking confirmation questions may not apply to introverted students, so teachers should walk around to ensure students are on track. Moreover, teachers should write instructions in detail with examples aided by visual and audio materials. Teachers should integrate reward-based motivation strategies to enhance student engagement. Teachers should encourage students to put one of their hands up if they have some confusion. Similarly, teachers should ask students to repeat key instructions or vocabulary words to confirm their comprehension. Also, teachers should encourage students to work in pairs and explain concepts to each other, allowing them to check each other's understanding.

Limitations of the study

This study has limitations that may impact the broader applicability of its findings. The data were collected within a specific educational context, making the results primarily relevant to that setting and not necessarily reflective of Nepal's wider EFL teaching community. Additionally, the research relied solely on observation, incorporating interviews could have provided deeper insights into teachers' perspectives on instruction-giving. Future research on this topic could explore the impact of using the mother tongue in instruction delivery or examine methods for capturing students' attention more effectively. Comparative studies could also be conducted to analyze the effectiveness of oral versus written instructions or the role of body language and visual aids in enhancing classroom management.

Abbreviations

EFL = English as a Foreign Language

ESL = English as a Second Language

L1 = First language / mother tongue

EMI = English Medium Instruction

Data availability statement

The data supporting the outcome of this research work has been reported in this manuscript.

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