Teachers' and Students' Perceptions on Learning the English Language and Its Significance in a School in Samtse Dzongkhag, Bhutan

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Original Research Article

ABSTRACT

This study investigates teachers' and students' perceptions on Learning English, specifically its opportunities and challenges. A qualitative approach guided by Constructivist paradigm was employed for the study. The data were gathered using one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews and classroom observations. A purposive sampling was used to collect data from students and teachers from a higher secondary school in Samtse Dzongkhag (district). The data were thematically analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2018) thematic analysis procedures. Findings revealed that learning English enhances cognitive flexibility, networking skills, career perspective, educational opportunities, and unfamiliarity with the English language and its rules. Further, the findings highlighted that there are intrapersonal and institutional barriers to learning English. It is recommended that the stakeholders concerned and school administration to make

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available of teaching aids and other facilities like printing and ICT laboratory. Additionally, the study also recommends the Ministry of Education (MoE) and teachers to provide adequate time for reading and writing literature.

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the study's background, how the education system in Bhutan began, particularly with English as a medium of instruction, the problem statement, research questions, aims, and significance.

1.1 Background

In 1914, Bhutan began its educational journey of Western model of education with the establishment of school in the Western district of Haa. In 1952, His Majesty Jigme Wangchuck, the Second King, established Hindi medium schools in Bumthang, Trashigang, Paro, Damphu and Wangduephodrang [1]. Initially, Hindi was the medium of instruction in schools. However, it was changed to English in 1961 because English was already the lingua franca of the world [2]. Currently, English is the language of instruction in schools and universities. The choice of English as a medium of instruction has allowed Bhutanese to communicate and learn in English-speaking countries without much difficulty [2].

Except for Dzongkha, all other subjects are being taught in English in the schools. English has gained a lot of popularity and is well received by teachers, students and administrators. They understand it as a pathfinder and a means of subsistence. Now that English has taken root in our education system, people have gained interest in it. But there are people with different perceptions on the language. Most people appreciate its contribution and learn it with utmost dedication, taking ownership, despite some difficulties and drawbacks. Individuals' motives and the environmental factors matter in learning English language. The collection of perceptions from reliable sources would assist in modifying and looking for strategies for quality learning.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Bhutan started its education system with the traditional monastic school. Modern education with English as the medium of instruction was introduced in the country sometime in the late 1961s, when only some privileged children got the opportunity to attend school. In the 1960s, modern education was made accessible and endorsed by the constitution as a right for every child in article 9 "the principle of state policy" [3]. Since then, the Bhutanese education system has been fostering and emphasizing English as a medium of instruction in schools.

All subjects in schools, except Dzongkha, are taught in English. The Ministry of Education strives to produce children with adequate English language competency at par with the native speakers of English and to make them capable of competing in global society to learn, trade, and share our beliefs and practices [4]. To achieve this, numerous workshops and training on uplifting the English competencies of teachers are conducted in the form of National Based In-service Programme (NBIP), Cluster Based In-service Programme (CBIP), and School Based In-service Programme (SBIP).

Despite those efforts, the current status of the national assessment system in Bhutan in 2015-2016 revealed poor average mark of English (BCSE) at 34.6 per cent and 33.45 per cent under Samtse Dzongkhag which is classified as level 3 [5]. Further, PISA-D (2017) revealed low performance (45.34%) of English among PISA-D countries [6]. However, in 2017 and 2018, there was a modest increase in BCSE, with 57.81 per cent and 59.17 per cent respectively. Furthermore, the English mean scores of Classes VII and VIII students have been below 60% for two consecutive years in 2017 and 2018, with 57 and 51.76 per cent and 54.7 and 59.1 per cent respectively in the recognized schools. The Ministry of Education (MoE) [1] revealed the highest secondary education repetition rates (10.9%) and dropout rates (7.15%) in a 6year period, which indicated low performance and maximum failure from the standard. In general REC and Educational Initiative (2011) reported that the level of learning of Bhutanese students is lower than average international level as represented by the progress in International Reading and Literacy skills.

Research study shows that English is the language of the business world. If a person can

speak English fluently, he/she can make strides on the management ladder; if not, one will always find him/herself languishing at the bottom of the ladder of management, despite brilliant business ideas [7]. Besides the business opportunities, learners can enhance their cognitive skills [8]. Studies have shown that learning English language has a profound impact on the child's brain, enhancing cognitive skills such as the ability to solve problems, think more logically, and enhance their learning [8]. Furthermore, Bruin et al. [9] contended that bilingual experience improves the brain's executive function – a command system that directs the attention processes that we use to plan, solve problems, and perform various other mentally demanding tasks. Further, Bruin et al. [9] found that international language speakers are more alert and observant when it comes to the words they hear and read. There is clear evidence that learning second-language skills would be better qualified to operate globally in fields such as economic cooperation and national security [10]. In addition, preference is for the people who are different from themselves, resulting in increased appreciation for and comprehension of other cultures. This suggests that learning English contributes to the enhancement of children's talent in various fields.

Although there are research studies on teachers' and students' perceptions of learning English language in the international context, there is no study specifically conducted in the context of Bhutan on the topic. As a result, the present study investigated the perspectives of teachers and students on learning English language.

1.3 Research Questions

This research was guided by the following main and sub-questions.

Primary Research Question: What are the teachers' and students' perceptions on learning English language? (in Bhutan).

Sub Research Questions:

1. What are the teachers' perceptions on learning English language?
2. How do students perceive learning English language?
3. What are the opportunities of learning English language?
4. What are the challenges of learning English language?

5. What are the strategies used for learning English language?

1.4 Aims of the Study

The aim of this research is to investigate the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the learning of the English language and to analyze the teaching and learning strategies employed. Additionally, this study seeks to provide empirical evidence on the wide-ranging benefits of English proficiency and to highlight the need for further research into effective teaching methods and environmental factors that influence language learning. The ultimate goal is to inform future educational policies and practices to create more effective English learning environments.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Historical Context of Education in Bhutan

Monastic education has been a significant part of Bhutanese culture since the 8th century [2]. The formal Bhutanese education system began in 1952 when the Second King established seven schools in various regions as Hindi medium schools [11]. By 1961, English became the medium of instruction, marking a shift towards modern education and aligning with the need for modern languages and skills [2,4]. Pandey and Pandey [10] emphasize that learning English in a non-native country opens numerous opportunities, enhancing educational and economic links globally. Al-khairy [12] also highlights its importance for social and economic growth.

The Royal University of Bhutan was established in 2003 to integrate and direct a network of nine colleges and tertiary institutions, and a private college was opened in 2009 [13]. Today, English remains the medium of instruction, playing a crucial role in the effectiveness of Bhutan's government-run education system [14].

2.2 Opportunities of Learning English

2.2.1 Global significance of English

English is widely recognized as the largest universal language, spoken by a significant portion of the world's population and serving as the official language in 53 countries [15]. The

British Council (2020) projected that around two billion people were learning English in 2020, emphasizing its role in education, commerce, medicine, banking, tourism, and diplomacy.

2.3 Economic and Academic Benefits

English proficiency is essential for international business and job markets. It is the dominant business language and is necessary for global workforce entry [15,7]. Studies indicate a strong correlation between multilingualism and increased future earnings (Chouksey, n.d.). Moreover, English proficiency enhances academic performance and provides access to global educational opportunities [16,17]. Bhutanese students, for instance, benefit from scholarships and educational opportunities abroad, with a significant number pursuing higher education in various countries [18].

2.4 Cognitive and Social Advantages

Learning English enhances cognitive and analytical abilities, fostering creativity and problem-solving skills [19,20]. It also promotes empathy, cultural awareness, and emotional intelligence through literature (Viorela, 2014). English improves networking skills, enabling better communication in a globally connected world [21, 22].

2.5 Challenges of Learning English

2.5.1 Linguistic and cultural barriers

Learning English poses challenges due to its complex rules, idiomatic expressions, and non-phonetic nature. Cultural differences can also hinder comprehension [23,20]. The influence of a native language (L1) on second language (L2) learning is significant, affecting pronunciation, grammar, and attitudes [24].

2.5.2 Educational environment

Classroom size and educational settings impact language learning. Large classes and lack of interactive environments hinder effective learning [25,26]. In Bhutan, factors such as frequent code-switching by teachers, lack of English proficiency among teachers, and traditional teaching methods pose additional challenges [27].

2.6 Strategies to Learn English

2.6.1 Active and systematic learning

Active learning, involving students in literary activities and encouraging reading, writing, and speaking in English, is crucial [28]. Understanding English as a system, focusing on grammar and sentence structure, and incorporating these lessons into daily practice can enhance language proficiency [29].

2.6.2 Communication and cognitive approaches

Viewing language as a tool for communication and regularly using it in conversations helps in acquiring proficiency. Engaging in discussions, using media resources, and practicing language skills in varied contexts are effective strategies for language acquisition [30].

2.6.3 Tailored learning methods

Recognizing individual learning styles and preferences, such as visual, auditory, or kinesthetic, and adapting teaching methods accordingly can significantly improve language learning outcomes. Encouraging self-monitoring and handling affective requirements, such as reducing anxiety and building confidence, are also essential for effective language learning [31].

The journey of English education in Bhutan reflects a broader global trend of adopting English for its vast opportunities and benefits. Despite the challenges, strategic approaches and an understanding of individual and contextual factors can significantly enhance English language learning. The continued emphasis on English in Bhutan's education system underscores its importance in the country's educational, economic, and social development.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter highlights the various components of the research methodology used in this study. These components include research paradigm, design, data collection method, data analysis, data triangulation, study trustworthiness, sampling and sampling size, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Paradigm

A paradigm is a set of philosophical assumptions that guide and direct thoughts and actions [32]. It influences the way information is gathered and interpreted, shaping the researcher's belief or worldview structure [33]. Creswell [34] notes that the philosophical paradigm can help clarify why researchers choose a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed approach. This research is guided by the constructivist paradigm, which is often used in qualitative analysis [35]. Constructivists believe that people seek to understand the world they live and work in, forming subjective interpretations of their experiences [35]. This study explored participants' views through interviews to construct themes. Constructivism aims to explain phenomena from participants' perspectives, with interpretations derived from both the researcher's and participants' experiences [36]. Constructivists claim that truth is subjective and multifaceted, reflecting individual viewpoints.

3.2 Research Design

A research design provides specific direction for research procedures [35]. This study employed a qualitative design, which locates the observer in the world [37]. Qualitative researchers aim to understand how individuals make sense of their environment and experiences, delineating the meaning-making process. Merriam [38] asserts that qualitative research gathers how people perceive their experiences and the importance they assign to them. Since this study gathered participants' perceptions, a qualitative design was adopted, collecting their views of their experiences.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured interviews and observation were used as data collection tools. Interviews are a process involving oral-verbal stimuli and responses [39], useful for collecting knowledge about personal emotions, thoughts, and expectations. The researcher used a semi-structured interview format, allowing for open-ended questions [35]. Both focus groups and one-on-one interviews were conducted. Six students from each Classes VII and VIII participated in focus group interviews and five teachers teaching these classes were selected for one-on-one interviews. Participants received an information sheet and provided consent before the interviews.

Observation, another data collection tool, allows researchers to track actual behavior (Kawulich, 2015). The researcher observed four English lessons, focusing on teaching challenges and strategies. Class size, environment, and facilities were noted, alongside teaching and classroom participation. Observations also included participants' use of language and pronunciation during interviews, generating additional information.

3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

Sampling is the process of selecting participants for analysis [40]. Due to time, cost, and accessibility constraints, the researcher used purposive sampling to gather information from English teachers and students in Classes VII and VIII. The study was conducted in a school under Samtse Dzongkhag. Six students from each Classes VII and VIII were involved in focus group interviews, with equal numbers of boys and girls. Five teachers participated in one-on-one interviews, lasting fifteen to forty minutes. Interviews were audio recorded with participants' consent for transcription and analysis.

3.5 Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness ensures the credibility of research results. Before analysis, transcribed responses were checked by participants for data authenticity. Interview questions were discussed with supervisors, and a pilot test was conducted. Feedback from the pilot test was collected and verified.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting data. Merriam [38] describes it as a complex process moving between concrete data and abstract concepts. Data were analyzed thematically following Braun & Clarke's (2018) procedure. Interviews were conducted, audio recorded, and transcribed. Data were then read thoroughly and coded for themes. Researchers reviewed these codes, combined them into categories, and generated themes. According to Creswell [35], researchers collect detailed information and shape it into categories or themes, forming broad patterns and generalizations associated with personal experiences or established literature.

Pseudonyms were used to safeguard participants' identities during data analysis.

3.7 Data Triangulation

Triangulation combines different research methods to validate outcomes. This technique enhances the reliability and validity of findings (Naeem et al, 2019). Observation, focus group interviews, and one-on-one interviews were compared and triangulated to authenticate study outcomes.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are crucial during data collection. Researchers must respect the research site, obtain permission before entry, and minimize disruption [34]. Written approval was obtained from the Dean of Research and Industrial Linkages, Chief Dzongkhag Education Officer, and the Principal. Interviews were conducted after school hours, except for classroom observations. Participants were informed about the study's intent and gave consent in advance. Anonymity was maintained using pseudonyms. After data collection, printed information or transcribed responses were emailed to interviewees for authentication and kept securely for future reference.

A qualitative research approach, guided by the constructivist paradigm, was used for this study. Data collection involved class observations and semi-structured interviews, with findings triangulated. Trustworthiness was ensured through peer review, member checking, and pilot testing, following ethical protocols.

4. FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from qualitative data gathered through interviews and observations, discussed under three main themes: opportunities, challenges, and strategies. The data is analyzed using the procedures of thematic analysis as per Braun and Clarke (2018).

4.1 Opportunities

Cognitive flexibility: Learning English enhances critical thinking, life skills, and cognitive flexibility in students. For instance, T1 mentioned that English allows for imagination and various interpretations, unlike technical subjects. Students echoed this, noting that English lessons provide valuable life lessons and help change mindsets, contributing to personal growth and better problem-solving skills.

Networking: Participants highlighted that English facilitates global communication and cultural exchange. For example, FGA5 noted that English enables conversations with people worldwide, enhancing social and cultural understanding. T3 emphasized that a common language helps form bonds across cultures, contributing to global citizenship.

Career Perspective: English proficiency expands career opportunities. Participants, like FGB1, stated that English is essential in the business world, enhancing job prospects both domestically and internationally. T4 added that many companies operate in English, making it crucial for securing high-paying jobs.

Professional Development: Teachers noted that English provides access to numerous online resources, aiding professional growth. T1 mentioned the availability of diverse teaching materials online, and T2 highlighted the benefits of online courses for professional advancement.

Education: English proficiency broadens educational opportunities globally. T2 observed that an English background allows for studying abroad, with many pursuing higher degrees internationally. This enhances educational prospects and access to high-quality resources and publications.

4.2 Challenges

Unfamiliarity with English Language and its Rules: Teachers and students find English syntax, grammar, and spelling challenging. T5 and T1 pointed out that complex rules and exceptions make teaching and learning difficult. For instance, words like "colonel" and "pony" have non-phonetic spellings and pronunciations, adding to the confusion.

Organizational Barriers: Large class sizes, lack of resources, and time constraints hinder effective teaching. T1 mentioned overcrowded classrooms affecting mobility and focus. Additionally, limited printing facilities and ICT resources, along with a heavy curriculum, impede efficient teaching.

Personal Setbacks: Poor reading and speaking habits, lack of exposure, and low self-esteem among students are significant obstacles. T2 emphasized the importance of a conducive learning environment and exposure to English.

Overuse of the mother tongue in class also hampers English communication skills.

Interpersonal Factors: A lack of understanding between learners, parents, and teachers impacts learning. FGB1 highlighted social pressure and lack of support from peers and family. Teachers noted that collective efforts are essential for effective language learning, and inconsistency in language use by different teachers confuses students.

4.3 Strategies

Learning Strategies: Students use personal strategies like reading books, using dictionaries, and accessing the internet to enhance their English skills. FGA2 mentioned reading extensively to improve vocabulary and comprehension. Watching English movies and listening to songs also help in learning vocabulary and pronunciation.

Teaching Skills and Strategies: Teachers employ various instructional strategies to enhance learning. T5 uses cooperative learning to encourage collaboration and active participation. Teachers also use enactment, writing processes, and peer evaluations to improve students' speaking and writing skills. Reading activities and maintaining a reading journal are emphasized for language development.

5. DISCUSSION

This study provides the key findings with respect to the research topic. The findings are discussed in reference to literature and previous studies and how they support or contradict the findings. The study used a qualitative design. The data were gathered through class observation and semi-structured interviews to ascertain the perspective of participants in learning English.

5.1 Opportunities of Learning English

One of the findings of the study is that there are benefits for learning English. These opportunities include cognitive flexibility, career perspective, networking, and education. The findings pertaining to each of these opportunities are discussed in the following sections.

Cognitive flexibility: The findings highlight that learning English increases pupils' cognitive flexibility. The majority of the participants said that learning English aided in cognitive flexibility. This is because students get the opportunity to read different literary pieces such as poems, stories, and novels which provided them with a wealth of ideas, life lessons, and philosophical concepts. Consistent with these findings, literature also showed that teaching English to young learners develops their cognitive abilities and leads to positive curricular outcomes [41]. Along the same line, Sylvester (n. d.) found that English literature prepares students to contribute as useful members of society through voice and actions as it sharpens the reader's awareness, broadening experience, and provide opportunities for the reader to exercise judgment about man, enabling such a reader to respond appropriately to life. Additionally, Viorela (2014) asserted that literature functions as a change agent since good literature deals with some aspects of the human condition, and can thus contribute to the emotional development of the child, and foster positive interpersonal attitudes. Cognitive flexibility theory believes in learners preparing to select, adapt, and combine knowledge and experiences in new ways to deal with a situation that is different than the ones they have encountered before [42].

This finding indicated that teaching and learning English helps in cognitive flexibility of the learners through exposure to different genres. Learning English helps to improve the brain's function and stress resilience by assisting in the adaptation to new environments and enhancing reading fluency and comprehension, as well as widening one's consciousness. Thus, English plays a vital role in personal development besides other benefits and opportunities bestowed by learning it.

Networking: The finding of the present study revealed that learning English has equipped students with the tool and the ability to communicate and converse with people all over the world. Almost all the participants expressed the benefits of English in expanding their network. This finding aligns with literature that shows that English is a dominant business language and it has become almost a requirement for people to speak English if they want to enter the global workforce [15]. The author also pointed out that English is the means by which we communicate our ideas, feelings, opinions, and thoughts to others. Similarly, Latha [21] contended that English is an operating language, allowing for normal communication and cooperation between persons from various

locations and language groups. Further, Welch et al. [43] stated that English language has changed from its role as an ordinary form of communication to that of a professional language, and it is now a fundamental prerequisite for successful professional communication. English has become the language of governance and administration to facilitate diplomatic ties, empowerment, and unification, as well as participation in international organizations and other aspects of life, such as the workplace, official meetings/dealings, seminars, presentations, and social gatherings [22,44,45].

The finding indicated that learning English expands the ability to communicate and converse with people all around the world since it is the language of education, commerce, medicine, banking, tourism, and diplomacy. English connects the world through English as s a means of communication in all fields and brings people closer regardless of geographical, social, and political differences.

Career perspective: The finding suggested that learning English can help learners improve their career prospects in life. It was pointed by the majority of the participants that English language skills broaden their career perspective. According to Durga (2018), the ability to communicate in English is a critical component of job success and growth, nationally and internationally. Further, Mohamadaid and Rasheed [22] contended that English has become a crucial aspect of making progress in every profession, and those who know it now have an easier time finding work in their home country and abroad. In Bhutan, besides school, almost every office administrative work is carried out in English. According to Tshering [45], more than 80 percent of the tasks performed in different domains are found in English, used more than the national language Dzongkha. Further, his study shows that 100 percent of English is used in banking, outside-country communication, and 90 to100 percent in e-communication, confirming that English is used as a language of administration. Therefore, Pandey and Pandey [7] claimed that an individual who learn English in a country where it is not a native language has a variety of options.

English is a must-know at work and the most important qualification for employment. Rao [44] and Yenkar (2019) pointed out that English proficiency is essential for job success and growth, as well as for gaining access to economic opportunities. Further, their studies found a good command of English as the basic requirement for a majority of professional job vacancies. On the other hand, low English proficiency or lack of English language abilities is a barrier to academic performance, career entry, and workforce success. Another study conducted by Ting et al. [46] in Malaysia also revealed that the lack of English competence and communication skills among graduates is often attributed to their high jobless rate. The present findings also suggested that effective communication skills can improve employability and career growth prospects. Besides it, in a media report and study papers on graduate unemployment, it is apparent that graduates must have high communication skills and English fluency in order to find work [46].

English competency broadens learners' career perspectives in individual lives as employers look for individuals who can communicate effectively in a variety of ways, both verbally and in writing. According to Pandey and Pandey [7], an employee with great ideas but poor English will remain at the bottom of the management ladder. Furthermore, according to their surveys, just 10 percent of the enormous number of professionals generated each year is employable in various businesses. The candidates are unfit because they lack the soft skills (English skills) that are required for employment. So, learning English is essential since one's competency in it opens varieties of job options both nationally and internationally.

Education: This study indicated that competency in English expands educational opportunities across the globe. The majority of the students and teacher participants expressed that having good competency in English language expands their educational opportunities around the world. According to Zhou et al. (2020), the overall number of full-time international graduate enrolment in the United States increased by three percent, and for doctorate and master degrees five percent and three percent respectively. The present finding also agreed with the data revealed by the Ministry of Education (2019) that Bhutanese students were enrolled in twenty-six countries around the world through scholarships administered by various agencies, with the highest number of students placed in Thailand (191) and India (104) respectively. Within Bhutan, in 2019, 50.2 percent of Class XII

graduates were enrolled in post-secondary education, with 40 percent admitted into TEIs, while the remaining 10 percent pursued their studies on a scholarship or at their own expense.

English is an extensively used language in higher education, without skills in English language; it is difficult to pursue higher education. Also, the majority of publishing houses currently only publish books in English for higher education students. As a result, it is vital for every student to gain English proficiency, as it is difficult to study at a higher level without it. English is present as a necessary component of studies or education [47].

5.2 Challenges of Learning English

The findings of the study showed that there are challenges of learning English. These challenges include unfamiliarity of English language and its rules, organizational impediments, personal setbacks, and interpersonal variables. These challenges are explored in the sections below.

Unfamiliarity with English language and its rules: The finding of the study indicated that complexity of English syntax, grammatical usage theory, rules, and regulations have made teaching and learning of English difficult. The majority of the teacher participants expressed that exceptions to rules in grammar, spelling, and pronunciation make it difficult to teach and convince the learners. Similarly, the majority of the student participants expressed that remembering rules in grammar and the exceptions are more challenging. Literature also shows that a nearly infinite number of rules have so many exceptions; reasonable punctuation must be used, the subject and verb must agree, commas are used only in some cases, we cannot use more than one negative in a sentence beside other environmental factors [48,23]. It is further supported by Mohammed [20] that English grammar consists of several rules used in a particular time and situation with specific rules, at the same time a word has multiple meanings and the meaning shifts according to the context, a phenomenon that makes the learning process much more complicated. Similarly, Izmaylova et al. [49] highlighted that the use of slang and colloquialism in English language is another obstacle faced by English learners to cover all its expressions. Yule (2014) pointed out that English is an arbitrary language, meaning that there is no connection between the form and the

meaning, such as a connection between the meaning and the form in the word dog.

The finding indicates that unfamiliarity with English language and its rules in grammar, spelling, pronunciation, and exceptions make teaching and learning of English difficult. While exceptions to the rules and figurative use of the language challenge the learners, they also increase the excitement of learning.

Organizational barriers: Large class size, lack of resources, bulky content, and lack of time hindered English learning. The teacher participants said that the biggest challenges in teaching and learning English are large class size, lack of resources, bulky content, and time constraints. The majority of the student participants said that learning English in the classroom with a large number of students is difficult as they do not get enough opportunities for individual learning and interaction with teachers. Similarly, studies found that organizational barriers such as large class size, lack of resources, and other infrastructural facilities reduce interaction between teachers and students affecting their academic performance [1,26]. Further, Yelkpieri et al. [50] and Enu et al. [51] asserted that large class sizes affect students' academic performance in learning English as teachers cannot give adequate attention to individual students. In line with this finding, Shah [52] revealed that inadequate infrastructure facilities, crowded classes, lack of educational materials, and poor teaching environment were found to affect students' academic performance in learning English. Additionally, Akomlafe and Adesua [53] revealed that high-quality academic performance requires a conducive school environment. Mupa et al. [54] also agreed that unavailability of resources in teaching affects student academic performance and leads to ineffective teaching. Lujan and DiCarlo [55] asserted that both active teaching and learning can only be achieved when there is an increase in teachers' activities and interaction with students.

The present finding indicates that organizational barriers reduce teachers' active teaching and interaction with students affecting their academic performance in learning English. Therefore, schools must address organizational impediments by providing adequate resources and improving the quality of teaching and learning environments.

Personal setbacks: The finding suggested that poor reading and speaking habits, lack of exposure, use of L1 (first language), and low self-esteem impede learning of English. The teacher participants said that one of the biggest challenges in learning English is poor reading and speaking habits. Similarly, the majority of the student participants said that their poor reading and speaking habits and lack of exposure affected learning English. The findings are consistent with literature which found that these personal behaviours and habits affect learning English and academic performance. Anyaegbu et al. [56] reported that children are exposed to other languages spoken at home other than English. As a result, most learners are not familiar with the English language. In addition, the author asserted that speaking the local language in schools among students and teachers makes learning English difficult. Ameyaw [57] found that when a child reads well, he or she can read, understand, and recall what has been learned but when they do not read properly, it impedes their understanding of the subject. Listiawati and Aryani (n.d.) asserted that low self-confidence and fear of making mistakes prevent learners from learning English as they think they will be laughed at. In addition, the author also pointed out that students' usage of their mother tongue as a means of communication hinders learning English. Further, Almoayidi [58] found that the use of L1 is likely to interfere with L2 acquisition and lead to more errors in writing in the target language. Prihadi and Chua [59] and Blouin [60] asserted that the majority of students learn English under unnecessary pressure; they do not like the language but are compelled to learn it.

The findings of the study indicate that students' personal behaviours such as poor reading and speaking habits, lack of exposure, use of L1 and low self-esteem impede learning of English. This suggests that teachers should design lessons that engage students in the learning process in a way that is enjoyable, encouraging, and motivating.

Interpersonal factors: The findings of the study suggest that lack of understanding and social interaction between learners, parents, and teachers negatively impacts learning. This is consistent with studies which found that lack of effective communication and mutual understanding among the stakeholders such as students, teachers, and parents affect academic performance in learning English [60]. In addition,

Agyekum [61] asserted that the relationship between teacher and student plays a vital role in developing students' success and social competence. Effective communication between teacher and students and positive rapport can reduce academic stress and improve students' performance [62].

5.3 Strategies to Learn English

The findings of the study showed that there are strategies to learn English. The strategies include learning strategies, and teaching skills and strategies. These strategies are discussed below.

Learning strategies: The findings indicated that reading, watching English movies, listening to songs and audio recordings, and using social media improve language abilities. The majority of the student participants pointed out that reading English books, watching English movies, listening to songs, and audio recordings help in improving language proficiency. In line with these findings, literature shows that learning strategies such as reading English books, newspapers, and magazines as well as watching movies and listening to audio recordings and songs can enhance English language acquisition. According to Baniyassen [63], reading books can increase vocabulary, improve reading comprehension, and broaden cultural knowledge. Zoubi [64] asserted that watching movies can enhance listening skills and pronunciation and provide exposure to various accents and slang. Al-Jarrah [65] stated that listening to songs and audio recordings can improve listening skills and pronunciation and provide exposure to different accents and dialects. Additionally, the study found that using social media for language learning, such as chatting with native speakers and joining English language groups, can improve language proficiency and provide opportunities for authentic communication.

The findings suggest that students should be encouraged to engage in these learning strategies to improve their English language abilities. Teachers can also incorporate these strategies into their lessons to create a more engaging and effective learning environment.

Teaching skills and strategies: The findings indicated that using varied teaching techniques aids in learning English. The majority of the teacher participants pointed out that using different teaching methods and strategies helps

in teaching and learning English. Literature supports this finding as it shows that effective teaching involves understanding what, how, when, and to whom to teach [30]. Ayua [66] asserted that using diverse teaching strategies can cater to different learning styles and needs, making the learning process more effective. Kinley [12] found that incorporating interactive and participatory teaching methods can enhance students' engagement and motivation in learning English. Wu (2020) stated that using technology and multimedia in teaching can provide a more dynamic and interactive learning experience, helping students to grasp concepts better [67-71].

The findings suggest that teachers should use a variety of teaching techniques to cater to different learning styles and needs. Incorporating interactive and participatory methods, as well as technology and multimedia, can enhance the teaching and learning process, making it more engaging and effective [72-77].

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of the study indicate that learning English offers numerous opportunities such as cognitive flexibility, expanded networking, improved career prospects, and greater educational opportunities. However, there are also challenges such as unfamiliarity with the language and its rules, organizational impediments, personal setbacks, and interpersonal factors. To overcome these challenges, effective learning strategies such as reading, watching movies, listening to songs, and using social media, as well as varied teaching techniques, should be employed. Successful language learning depends on learners' interests, motivation, and interpersonal relationships. While participants recognized the benefits of learning English, they also acknowledged challenges such as unfamiliarity with the language, organizational impediments, personal setbacks, and interpersonal issues. Reflective practices and varied learning strategies can enhance students' performance and interest in English.

6.1 Key Findings

Cognitive and Life Skills: Learning English enhances students' cognitive flexibility, broadens their experiences, and equips them with skills to handle real-life situations effectively, fostering creativity and constructive skills that contribute to a healthy society.

Career Opportunities: English proficiency is essential for career success and growth, offering better job prospects both nationally and internationally.

Barriers to Learning: Students face challenges in learning English due to unfamiliarity with its rules, large class sizes, lack of resources, and time constraints. These factors hinder teacher-student interaction and affect academic performance.

Personal Setbacks: Lack of exposure, reliance on the first language, and low self-esteem hinder students' ability to learn English, affecting their communication skills and personal and professional goals.

Effective Strategies: Employing various teaching and learning strategies, such as reading, watching movies, and listening to songs, improves language proficiency. Teachers need to use diverse methods to cater to different learning styles and needs.

Environmental Factors: A supportive learning environment is crucial for effective English learning. Teachers should create a comfortable and engaging atmosphere, and students should practice extensively and maintain a positive attitude.

6.2 Recommendations

Class Size Reduction: Authorities should work towards reducing class sizes to enhance effective teaching and learning of English.

Resource Provision: The Ministry of Education and school principals should provide adequate teaching aids and printing facilities.

Promoting Reading and Writing: Schools should engage students in programs like Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) and Drop Everything and Write (DEAW) to improve reading and writing habits.

Future Research: Future studies should involve students from higher classes and multiple schools across Bhutan to provide more generalizable results.

7. LIMITATIONS

The study's small sample size and the young age of participants limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, data collection was restricted due to pandemic-related lockdowns, reducing the number of class observations and teachers involved.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

I hereby declare that generative AI technologies such as Chat GPT, GPT-4 model developed by Open AI has been used during editing of manuscripts.

Details of the AI usage are given below:

1. Editing
2. Summarization

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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