

## Perceptions, Challenges, and Pedagogical Strategies in English Language Acquisition: A Qualitative Case Study of a Middle Secondary School in Samtse, Bhutan

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the multi-perspective perceptions of teachers and students regarding English language acquisition, focusing explicitly on its associated socio-cognitive opportunities, structural challenges, and pedagogical strategies. Situated within a social constructivist paradigm, the study employed an exploratory qualitative case study design. Empirical data were gathered through three distinct qualitative instruments: semi-structured individual interviews with teachers (n=5), focus group discussions with middle secondary students (n=12 across Classes VII and VIII), and four (n=4) direct non-participant classroom observations to achieve data triangulation. Purposive sampling was used to select the participant cohorts within a single government middle secondary school context in Samtse Dzongkhag, Bhutan.

The collected data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically following the six-phase framework propounded by Braun and Clarke (2018). The empirical findings revealed that while English language proficiency significantly enhances learners' cognitive flexibility, transnational networking skills, macro-economic career perspectives, and global educational mobility, the learning process remains heavily obstructed by distinct bottlenecks. These challenges include syntactic and spelling rules inherent in a non-phonetic language, intrapersonal affective filters (such as communication anxiety and low self-esteem), and critical institutional barriers (including high classroom density ranging from 37 to 41 students, heavy teaching schedules, and resource limitations).

To address these friction points, teachers and students use adaptive pedagogical interventions, including cooperative learning groups, process-oriented portfolios, and independent multimedia tools. Based on these findings, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD) and local school administrations optimize student-teacher ratios and provide essential infrastructure facilities, such as upgraded printing services and accessible digital laboratories. Additionally, the study recommends that language educators implement structured cross-curricular literacy routines—such as *Drop Everything and Read (DEAR)* and *Drop Everything and Write (DEAW)*—to lower student anxiety, bypass learning weaknesses, and cultivate long-term target language proficiency.

**Keywords:** English Language Acquisition, Social Constructivism, Cognitive Flexibility, Affective Filter, Classroom Density, Thematic Analysis, Bhutan.

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## Introduction

### Introduction

This research explores the multi-perspective perceptions, institutional challenges, and pedagogical strategies surrounding English language education within a middle secondary school in

Samtse Dzongkhag, Bhutan. This introductory chapter outlines the foundational architecture of the study. It establishes the historical and operational background of English-medium education in Bhutan, delineates the problem statement by analyzing regional and national academic deficiencies, and defines the core research questions and objectives. Furthermore, this chapter highlights the theoretical and practical significance of the inquiry, defines

localized operational boundaries, and presents a structural blueprint for the remaining chapters of the paper.

## Background of the Study

### Evolution of Modern English-Medium Education in Bhutan

Bhutan's engagement with westernized secular education began in 1914 with the establishment of the first modern school in the western district of Haa. In 1952, His Majesty Jigme Wangchuck, the Second King of Bhutan, expanded this secular system by establishing foundational schools in Bumthang, Trashigang, Paro, Damphu, and Wangdue Phodrang (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2014). Initially, Hindi was used as the primary medium of instruction across these early institutions. However, recognizing that English had emerged as the global *lingua franca* for international trade, science, and cross-border communication, the Royal Government of Bhutan systematically transitioned its system-wide medium of instruction to English in 1961 (Dorji, 2005).

Currently, English serves as the operational foundation for instructional delivery across all levels of the government school network and tertiary universities. Except for the national language, Dzongkha, all academic subjects within the Bhutanese curriculum are taught exclusively in English. This policy choice has historically allowed Bhutanese scholars to pursue higher academic degrees, corporate ventures, and technical training in English-speaking nations without encountering prohibitive linguistic barriers (Dorji, 2005).

### The Contemporary Sociolinguistic Landscape

Within the modern Bhutanese educational landscape, English has gained widespread popularity and acceptance among educators, learners, and institutional administrators. It is broadly perceived as an essential tool for professional advancement and an indispensable means of post-academic subsistence.

However, because English operates within a multilingual ecosystem alongside Dzongkha and regional languages (such as Sharchop or Nepali), individual perspectives regarding its acquisition remain diverse and multi-faceted. While the majority of stakeholders appreciate its contribution to global mobility and demonstrate a high level of dedication toward mastering its use, the learning process is hindered by distinct linguistic, physical, and personal bottlenecks.

From a constructivist viewpoint, an individual's language development is highly sensitive to external environmental constraints and intrapersonal motives. Consequently, gathering detailed qualitative perspectives from active participants serves as an empirical baseline for designing targeted, context-appropriate instructional strategies to improve the quality of language learning.

## Statement of the Problem

### Policy Aspirations versus Empirical Realities

Since the rapid expansion of modern education in the 1960s, access to schooling has evolved from a selective privilege into a fundamental constitutional right. This is codified under Article 9 of the *Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan*, which establishes education as a core Principle of State Policy (Royal Government of Bhutan [RGoB], 2008).

To support this constitutional mandate, the Ministry of Education and Skills Development strives to produce learners who

demonstrate English language competencies comparable to native speakers. This standard is seen as essential for allowing Bhutanese citizens to compete on the global stage, engage in international commerce, and share their cultural values internationally (Dorji, 2003).

To achieve this goal, the state invests heavily in professional development, conducting ongoing professional capacity-building workshops for educators. These are delivered through systems such as the National Based In-service Programme (NBIP), Cluster Based In-service Programme (CBIP), and School Based In-service Programme (SBIP).

Despite these continuous professional interventions, a stark gap remains between high-level policy expectations and student performance outcomes. National assessment baselines from the Bhutan Certificate of Secondary Education (BCSE) revealed a low national English average score of **34.6 percent**, with schools in Samtse Dzongkhag falling even lower at an average of **33.45 percent**, a benchmark classified as Level 3 performance (Gurung, 2017).

On the international stage, the Program for International Student Assessment for Development (PISA-D) reported that Bhutanese students achieved an average proficiency rate of only **45.34 percent** in reading literacy, placing them well below the baseline average for participating nations (Bhutan Council for School Examination and Assessment [BCSEA], 2019).

[ POLICY OBJECTIVE ] —► Competing Globally at Native-Speaker Proficiency (Dorji, 2003)

|

▼ (Stark Empirical Disconnect)

|

[ PERFORMANCE REALITY ]

- Samtse Dzongkhag BCSE Baseline Average: 33.45% (Level 3 Deficient)

- International PISA-D Reading Literacy: 45.34% (Below Baseline Average)

- Class VII & VIII Continuous Language Achievement: Below 60% Threshold.

### Targeted Secondary Level Vulnerabilities

While later BCSE evaluations showed a modest rise to 57.81 percent and 59.17 percent, targeted evaluations at the middle secondary tier show persistent performance vulnerabilities. Specifically, the mean English scores for Class VII and Class VIII students remained consistently below the 60 percent proficiency threshold for consecutive academic cycles, dropping as low as 51.76 percent and 54.7 percent across recognized regional schools.

This low performance corresponds with broader institutional issues. National education data highlights that the middle secondary tier faces some of the highest student repetition rates (**10.9 percent**) and student dropout rates (**7.15 percent**) across a six-year reporting window, indicating systemic learning friction within this specific academic transition (MoE, 2014).

Reflecting these findings, the Royal Education Council and Educational Initiatives (2011) confirmed that the overall literacy and reading comprehension levels of Bhutanese students remain low when evaluated against international progress markers in reading and literacy skills.

## The Localized Knowledge Gap

This trend presents a major obstacle because target language fluency directly regulates a student's long-term socioeconomic mobility. Mastery of English allows individuals to advance into corporate management positions, whereas low proficiency restricts candidates to entry-level roles despite their technical capabilities (Pandey & Pandey, 2014).

Furthermore, language acquisition provides critical cognitive benefits, developing a child's logical reasoning, executive attention functions, and independent problem-solving skills (Wallin, 2019; de Bruin et al., 2014). It expands intercultural awareness and develops a student's capacity to operate in international fields like economic cooperation and diplomacy (Bhatia, 2012).

While international literature offers extensive research on how teachers and students perceive English language learning, there is a lack of focused qualitative research exploring these multi-perspective perceptions within the specific socio-cultural context of Bhutanese secondary schools.

This study addresses that localized knowledge gap by conducting an empirical qualitative inquiry into the unique challenges and learning strategies present within a middle secondary school in Samtse Dzongkhag.

## Research Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to explore the qualitative perceptions, structural experiences, and pedagogical views of teachers and students regarding English language learning within a selected middle secondary school in Samtse Dzongkhag.

To fulfill this overarching aim, the study addresses three specific research objectives:

1. To identify the socio-cognitive and macro-economic opportunities associated with English language acquisition as perceived by secondary teachers and students.
2. To examine the syntactic, institutional, and intrapersonal challenges that hinder effective English language teaching and learning within the classroom.
3. To document the independent learning strategies and teacher-led instructional interventions used to overcome these challenges and build target language proficiency.

## Research Questions

Guided by a qualitative framework, this study answers the following primary research question: **How do teachers and students perceive the opportunities, challenges, and instructional strategies associated with English language learning in a middle secondary school in Samtse Dzongkhag?**

This central question is supported by three specific sub-questions:

1. What socio-cognitive advantages and macro-economic opportunities do teachers and students associate with gaining proficiency in English?
2. What specific syntactic exceptions, organizational limitations, and intrapersonal anxieties act as barriers to effective language learning in the classroom?
3. What autonomous learning methods and pedagogical interventions do students and teachers use to manage these barriers?

## Significance of the Study

This study offers valuable insights for several key educational stakeholders in Bhutan:

- **For Curriculum Designers and Policy Makers:** By providing empirical data on how students handle non-phonetic vocabulary and high curriculum load, this study offers actionable insights for the Ministry of Education and Skills Development to refine future textbook development.
- **For Institutional Administrators and School Principals:** The documented findings on classroom densities (**37 to 41 students**) and teacher workloads (**25 to 29 periods**) offer a practical baseline for school leaders to optimize internal class schedules and redistribute teaching resources.
- **For Classroom Practitioners and Teachers:** This study outlines a variety of practical strategies—such as cooperative learning configurations and process-oriented portfolio tracking—that educators can adapt to reduce student anxiety and lower the affective filter in large classrooms.
- **For the Academic Literature:** This research addresses a clear regional gap by providing qualitative baseline data from Samtse Dzongkhag, serving as a reference point for future researchers exploring second-language acquisition across Bhutan.

## Scope and Delimitations of the Study

This study is bounded by specific operational parameters:

- **Geographic and Institutional Boundaries:** The fieldwork was conducted exclusively within a single public middle secondary school located in Samtse Dzongkhag, Bhutan.
- **Participant Selection:** The sample was strictly delimited to five (n=5) secondary English language teachers and twelve (n=12) students across Classes VII and VIII, focusing directly on the unique challenges of this middle secondary transition.
- **Methodological Focus:** The study used a purely qualitative approach to explore lived experiences and subjective perceptions, meaning it does not evaluate statistical correlation or test generalized quantitative hypotheses.

## Organization of the Paper

This Research is organized into five distinct chapters, structured as follows:

Research BLUEPRINT	
CHAPTER 1	Introduction, Context, Problem Statement, & Objectives
CHAPTER 2	Literature Review: Historical, Linguistic, & Affective
CHAPTER 3	Methodology: Constructivism, Sampling, & Triangulation
CHAPTER 4	Combined Findings & Discussion: Empirical Thematic Core

CHAPTER 5	Conclusion, Practical Recommendations, & Limitations
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## Summary

Chapter 1 established the foundational framework of this study by tracing the evolution of westernized modern education in Bhutan and the historical transition to an English-medium curriculum in 1961. It defined the core problem statement by contrasting the country's global educational goals with low regional and national test scores, such as the BCSE and PISA-D metrics. To address this issue, the chapter introduced three targeted research objectives and laid out the significance and scope of the study. This structural framework provides the foundation for the theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

## Literature Review

### Introduction

This chapter reviews the theoretical, empirical, and historical literature concerning second language (L2) acquisition, focusing specifically on the perceptions, opportunities, and structural challenges encountered by educators and learners. The review is organized into four core thematic sections.

1. Section 2.2 traces the historical trajectory of the Bhutanese modern education system and the adoption of English as the medium of instruction.
2. Section 2.3 establishes the theoretical framework of the study, linking **Vygotsky's Social Constructivism** to literature-driven cognitive flexibility and macro-economic career mobility.
3. Section 2.4 evaluates the systemic linguistic, orthographic, and institutional barriers that hinder target language development.
4. Section 2.5 examines independent and teacher-led pedagogical strategies used to lower learner anxiety and build communicative competence.

### Historical Context of the Bhutanese Educational Landscape

#### From Monastic Foundations to Modern Medium of Instruction

For centuries, formal education in Bhutan was exclusively monastic, focusing primarily on classical theological literacy since the 8th century (Dorji, 2005). The transition toward westernized secular education began in 1952 under the direction of the Second King, Jigme Wangchuck, who established seven foundational schools across Bumthang, Ha, Wangdue Phodrang, Damphu, and Paro using Hindi as the initial instructional medium (Centre for Educational Research and Development [CERD], 2002).

By 1961, marking the launch of the First Five-Year Plan, modern English was officially adopted as the system-wide medium of instruction (Dorji, 2003). This policy shift was driven by a strategic need to modernize the workforce, acquire global technical skills, and participate in transnational socio-economic development (Dorji, 2005).

Learning English in an environment where it is not a native tongue provides developing nations with essential structural options (Pandey & Pandey, 2014). It establishes vital links with international institutions to fulfill pressing domestic educational and economic requirements (Al-khairy, 2013).

### English as a Vehicle for Higher Educational Mobility

The introduction of an English-medium curriculum was also designed to guarantee that Bhutanese scholars could access higher technical fields and professional postgraduate training outside the country (LaPrairie, 2014). This foundation directly supported the development of domestic higher education.

This tertiary network expanded with the founding of the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) in 2003, which integrated nine regional colleges, followed by the opening of the country's first private college in 2009 (Schuelka & Maxwell, 2016). To this day, the target language remains the core operational foundation of the state-run school system, and its effective implementation is recognized as a major factor determining the quality of Bhutanese educational outcomes (Royal Education Council [REC], 2012).

### Theoretical Framework: Constructivism and Socio-Cognitive Opportunities

#### Social Constructivism and Cognitive Flexibility

This study is guided by **Lev Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory**, which asserts that advanced cognitive growth and language development emerge directly through social interaction, collaborative activities, and cultural institutions (Nguyen & Terry, 2017). Within this social constructivist paradigm, language is viewed not merely as a set of grammar rules to be memorized, but as a dynamic psychological tool used to build shared meaning and interpret the world (Creswell, 2018).

Learning a second language exercises the brain's neural networks, altering structural areas linked to conscious memory, analytical focus, and creative thought (Yule, 2010). When young learners are exposed to a target language, it expands their cognitive capacities and leads to positive performance across the school curriculum (Tehrani & Razali, 2018).

Multilingual individuals demonstrate higher cognitive flexibility, showing a more advanced capacity to process, adapt, and represent complex information from divergent perspectives (Mephram & Martinovic, 2018). This cognitive expansion is particularly evident when students engage with English literature:

*"English literature prepares students to contribute as useful members of society through voice and actions as it sharpens the reader's awareness, broadens experience, and provides opportunities for the reader to exercise judgment about man, enabling such a reader to respond appropriately to life."* (Sylvester, n.d.)

Literary texts function as active instruments for emotional growth and positive behavior modification, helping children build empathy, cross-cultural tolerance, and emotional intelligence (Viorela, 2014). This exposure helps learners think creatively to solve complex real-world problems (Mohammed, 2018).

#### Macro-Economic Career Mobility and Global Citizenship

In modern society, English serves as the primary *lingua franca* for international business, crossing geographic, political, and cultural borders (Pandey & Pandey, 2014). Because it operates as the dominant language of global commerce, fluency has become a baseline requirement for entering the modern workforce (Nishanthi, 2018).

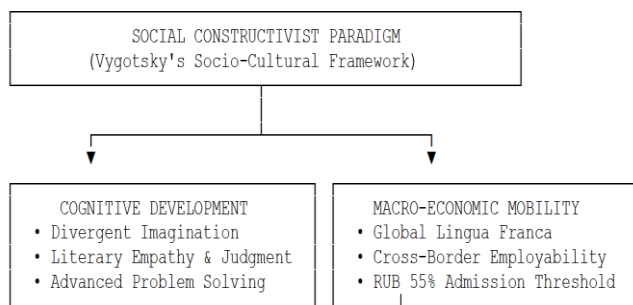
As a result, command of the target language functions as a key that unlocks access to global industries, advanced science, and international technology (Crystal, 2003). This linguistic currency is

highly valued by employers, who view it as a core indicator of international thinking and effective communication skills, meaning multilingual candidates often secure higher long-term earnings and broader employment options than monolingual applicants (Bhatia, 2012).

This economic pattern is clearly mirrored within the Bhutanese administration. Over 80 percent of professional tasks in core areas—such as national banking, international e-communication, and external diplomacy—are conducted primarily in English rather than the national language, Dzongkha (Tshering, 2020).

Furthermore, English proficiency directly regulates access to higher education within Bhutan. Institutional admission criteria set by the Royal University of Bhutan state that secondary school graduates must secure a **minimum score of 55 percent in English** to qualify for tertiary placement or merit-based international scholarships (RUB, 2020, 2021).

Linguistic competence also underpins global academic mobility. It facilitates participation in international graduate programs (Zhou et al., 2020) and allows Bhutanese scholars to secure state-administered scholarships across diverse international destinations, such as Thailand and India (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2019).



## Structural, Institutional, and Intrapersonal Challenges

### Orthographic and Syntactic Anomalies of a Non-Phonetic Language

Second language learning in multilingual environments presents unique structural complexities (Dhillon & Wanjiru, 2013). A major obstacle stems from the linguistic rules and exceptions built into English grammar, sentence structures, and punctuation frameworks (Sioco & Vera, 2018).

Because English is fundamentally a **non-phonetic language**, there is frequently an arbitrary mismatch between written text structures and oral pronunciation styles, which easily misleads non-native learners (Yule, 2014).

Additionally, vocabulary acquisition is complicated by contextual shifts where single words carry multiple meanings depending on their grammatical placement, leading to learner confusion during conversation (Mohammed, 2018). This structural unfamiliarity is worsened when students default to literal mental translation from their native language (L1), causing recurring errors in spelling, pronunciation, and sentence mechanics (Romero & Manjarres, 2017).

### Institutional Barriers: Density and Workload Constraints

The physical classroom environment and overall school layout directly shape language production outcomes, requiring a secure setting that allows for open communication (Bingol, 2014). When

class sizes become overcrowded, student performance often declines (Aoumeur, 2017).

Managing high student density stands as a primary structural challenge for educators worldwide, particularly within developing nations (Yelkperci et al., 2012). Overcrowded classrooms hinder teaching delivery, limit physical movement, and reduce the frequency of direct teacher-student interactions (Enu et al., 2015).

These physical constraints, combined with heavy course contents and limited teaching materials, create an unsupportive learning atmosphere that directly lowers academic achievement (Shah, 2015). These systemic challenges were highlighted in the *Bhutan Education Blueprint (2014–2024)*, which identified critical bottlenecks in regional schools, including large class sizes, limited resource access, heavy curricula, and inadequate professional development paths (MoE, 2014).

These structural issues correspond directly with lower student language outcomes. National assessment statistics reveal that average English scores for secondary classes remain low, frequently ranging between **27.3 and 54.5 percent by Class VIII** (MoE, 2014).

### The Affective Filter: Anxiety and First Language Interference

To understand the intrapersonal challenges faced by L2 learners, this study draws on **Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis**. Krashen asserts that emotional variables—such as communication anxiety, low self-esteem, and low motivation—act as a psychological barrier that blocks input and prevents language acquisition from happening effectively (Krashen, 1982).

When a classroom climate emphasizes rapid corrections or rigid testing, the student's affective filter rises, causing them to withdraw from classroom activities out of a fear of public mistakes or negative peer evaluation (Brown, 2000).

[ High Anxiety / Fear of Mistakes ]

[ Low Self-Esteem / Peer Pressure ] —► RAISES AFFECTIVE FILTER —► Blocks Language input

[ Excessive L1 Reliance (Nepali) ] & Causes Passivity.

This anxiety is intensified by first language (L1) interference. Research shows that up to 85% of language teachers observe that heavy reliance on the mother tongue prevents students from expressing themselves clearly in English (Miles, 2004).

In the Bhutanese context, this issue is complicated by several distinct school-level factors (LaPrairie, 2014):

- Frequent code-switching between English and local languages (such as Dzongkha or Nepali) by educators during class time.
- A widespread institutional focus on rote content instruction to pass terminal examinations rather than building active communication skills.
- A lack of coordinated support from non-language subject teachers to reinforce correct English usage during other classes.

Finally, weak reading habits outside of school hours limit vocabulary growth, whereas consistent independent reading expands a student's mental horizons and directly predicts higher academic success (Ameyaw, 2018; Anyaegbu et al., 2016).

## Pedagogical Countermeasures and Learning Strategies

### Typologies of Language Learning Strategies (LLSs)

Language learning strategies comprise the specific, conscious actions, behaviors, and steps taken by students to improve how they acquire, store, and retrieve target language information (Shi, 2017). LLS utilization is shaped by human differences, social environments, and specific classroom contexts (Nguyen & Terry, 2017). Because learners possess distinct sensory preferences—ranging from visual and analytical styles to impulsive or auditory approaches—educators must use a variety of teaching methods to match these diverse student profiles (Brown, 2020).

To build communicative competence, literature highlights five essential strategies for successful learning (Shi, 2017):

1. **Active Task Approach:** Experientially participating in literary activities.
2. **Systemic Language Understanding:** Analyzing grammatical frameworks and sentence structure rules (McCarthy et al., 2018).
3. **Communicative Medium Tracking:** Using target language conversations as a regular tool for daily interaction.
4. **Affective Management:** Lowering personal anxiety and building a positive attitude toward mistakes.
5. **Self-Monitoring:** Independently tracking one's own pronunciation and vocabulary growth.

### Collaborative and Technology-Mediated Interventions

To counteract institutional limits and lower the student's affective filter, communicative language teaching (CLT) relies on interactive strategies. Methods such as brainstorming sessions, interactive games, roleplay demonstrations, and small cooperative group work are highly effective for engaging students and encouraging participation (Bearing & Unin, 2016). Using collaborative group structures distributes the cognitive load, allowing students to test ideas within a small group of peers before speaking in front of the entire class (Creswell, 2018).

Furthermore, incorporating creative contemporary media—such as pop music or films—can increase learner motivation and provide accessible examples of rhyme schemes, metaphors, and natural pronunciation patterns (Bernaus et al., 2017; Jamalifar & Chalak, 2014).

To correct regular orthographic and pronunciation errors, researchers recommend combining target language media with independent tools (Sriprabha, 2015). These include recording and listening to digital audio clips, using dictionaries to verify word meanings, and reading texts aloud to build verbal confidence and overcome first-language phonetic habits.

### Summary

The literature review confirms that while English language acquisition provides valuable cognitive flexibility and opens up critical paths for global career mobility, the learning process faces significant barriers. These challenges include irregular grammatical rules, high classroom density, heavy teacher workloads, and the psychological anxiety created by a high affective filter.

To overcome these bottlenecks, studies emphasize the importance of using targeted strategies, such as cooperative learning tasks, process-based writing logs, and interactive digital media. These insights established the conceptual foundation for the methodology detailed in Chapter 3 and provide the analytical framework used to evaluate the empirical findings presented in Chapter 4.

## Methodology

### Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework used to investigate the perceptions, structural challenges, and pedagogical strategies surrounding English language education in a middle secondary school context within Samtse Dzongkhag. To ensure a systematic and rigorous inquiry, this section details the underlying research paradigm, design selection, purposive sampling parameters, data collection instruments, data triangulation protocols, and thematic analysis procedures. Additionally, this chapter articulates the measures taken to maintain study trustworthiness and adheres to strict ethical standards required for qualitative field research.

### Research Paradigm

This study is situated within the **constructivist paradigm** (frequently termed social constructivism), an approach designed for qualitative inquiry where researchers seek to understand the world through the lived experiences of its participants (Creswell, 2018; Mertens, 2010). A paradigm operates as a foundational system of beliefs and philosophical assumptions that directly shapes how data is gathered, processed, and interpreted (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

The constructivist framework is defined by specific ontological and epistemological positions that align directly with the objectives of this study:

- **Ontological Stance (The Nature of Reality):** Constructivism rejects the notion of a single, objective reality. Instead, it asserts that truth is subjective, multi-faceted, and co-constructed through individual interpretations of experiences (Adom et al., 2016). In this study, "perceptions of English learning" are treated as multiple, shifting realities uniquely shaped by the distinct roles of teachers and students.
- **Epistemological Stance (The Nature of Knowledge):** Knowledge is viewed as value-bound and inductive, emerging directly from the interactions between the researcher and the participants (Creswell, 2014). Rather than restricting responses into pre-determined quantitative categories, this paradigm allows the researcher to capture the complexity and ambiguity of participants' true meanings (Creswell, 2018).

By embracing this paradigm, the researcher avoids treating language acquisition as a purely mechanical process. Instead, it is analyzed as a lived social phenomenon, allowing the study to capture how participants construct meaning from their specific educational environment.

### Research Design

To operationalize the constructivist paradigm, this study used an **exploratory qualitative case study design** (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Qualitative research serves as a localized, interpretive

practice that anchors the observer directly within the participant's world, focusing primarily on how individuals make sense of their environments and experiences (Merriam, 2009). The primary goal is to examine the meaning-making process and evaluate how individuals interpret the structural conditions they face (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

A qualitative case study design was selected for several reasons:

1. **Contextual Depth:** It provides an ideal framework for exploring a bounded system—specifically, a single middle secondary school environment in Samtse Dzongkhag—allowing for deep, localized analysis.
2. **Holistic Inquiry:** It accommodates multiple variables (such as physical classroom layout, individual anxieties, and teaching workloads) simultaneously.
3. **Perspective Capturing:** It allows the researcher to gather rich descriptions of participant experiences to explain *why* and *how* specific challenges occur.

This design directly supports the study's primary research question by gathering detailed, text-based descriptions of language learning barriers and strategies rather than relying on statistical generalizations.

## Sampling Technique and Participant Profile

### Purposive Sampling Strategy

This study used non-probability **purposive sampling** to select institutional sites and individual participants (Mertens, 2010). Purposive sampling requires researchers to select participants intentionally based on their direct experience with the central phenomenon under analysis (Creswell, 2014). This approach ensures that the gathered data is rich in information and highly relevant to the research questions (Kothari, 2004).

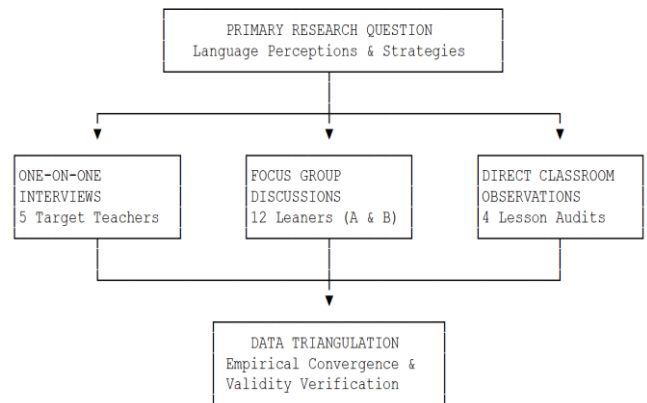
The selection criteria required participants to be actively engaged in teaching or learning English within the middle secondary school tier (Classes VII and VIII) in Samtse Dzongkhag. This specific tier serves as a critical transition phase in the Bhutanese curriculum, where language demands shift significantly from basic fluency to analytical literary interpretation.

### Sample Size and Demographics

To maintain an optimal sample size that avoids data dilution while ensuring deep qualitative insight, the final sample comprised **seventeen (N=17) individual participants**, separated into two distinct cohorts:

1. **Teacher Cohort (n=5):** This sample included all five English language educators actively teaching Classes VII and VIII at the selected school. The cohort consisted of two (n=2) male teachers and three (n=3) female teachers, capturing a comprehensive view of departmental workload dynamics and lesson-planning challenges.
2. **Student Cohort (n=12):** This sample consisted of twelve middle secondary school students. To balance developmental viewpoints, six (n=6) students were selected from Class VII and six (n=6) from Class VIII. To maintain gender equity across the sample, the sections were divided equally into three (n=3) boys and three (n=3) girls per class level.

## Data Collection Instruments



### One-on-One Semi-Structured Teacher Interviews

The five selected educators participated in separate, one-on-one semi-structured interviews guided by a pre-determined, open-ended question protocol (see Appendix A). Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to document a participant's precise words while retaining the flexibility to use probing prompts based on the immediate conversational flow (Creswell, 2018). These interviews captured firsthand accounts of professional workloads, curriculum density, resource gaps, and perceived learner anxieties (Merriam, 2009). The sessions ranged from 15 to 40 minutes in duration, and were audio-recorded with explicit consent for subsequent verbatim transcription.

### Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with Students

The student cohort participated in focus group discussions divided by class levels to reduce social hierarchies and encourage open sharing:

- **Focus Group A (FGA):** Comprised the six (n=6) selected Class VII students.
- **Focus Group B (FGB):** Comprised the six (n=6) selected Class VIII students.

Focus groups are highly effective for uncovering shared social norms, collective student challenges, and peer communication barriers (Kothari, 2004). Using a semi-structured protocol, the sessions allowed students to discuss shared personal setbacks, use of their first language (L1), and anxieties without feeling singled out. These sessions were audio-recorded and fully transcribed.

### Direct Classroom Observations

To complement the self-reported interview data, the researcher conducted four (n=4) direct classroom observations as an *etic* (non-participant) observer (Kawulich, 2015). Using a structured observation form (see Appendix D), the researcher audited four active English lessons, focusing directly on the physical environment and behavioral interactions.

Key metrics recorded during these observations included:

- **Classroom Density Check:** Documenting physical room limitations across specific audited classes, such as **37 students in CL-2** and **41 students in CL-3**.
- **Pedagogical Evaluation:** Observing teacher-led group activities, vocabulary correction methods, and how rules regarding target language use were enforced.

- **Participation Auditing:** Tracking student engagement levels, checking for L1 use during peer tasks, and documenting communication avoidance patterns.

Additionally, the researcher noted linguistic performance factors, such as pronunciation accuracy and speech habits, during the interview sessions to provide broader contextual data.

### Data Triangulation Framework

To ensure the validity and reliability of the qualitative findings, this study used **data triangulation** by evaluating evidence from multiple data collection methods (Naeem, 2019). Triangulation involves analyzing a single research topic using diverse data-gathering instruments to cross-examine findings and ensure consistency (Triangulation Diagram).

In this study, data triangulation was operationalized by cross-checking participant accounts against direct field evidence:

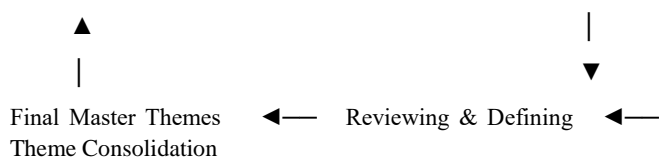
- Teacher reports regarding the challenges of managing large classes were cross-verified against the enrollment numbers and spatial limits noted in the **Classroom Observations (CL-2 and CL-3)**.
- Student accounts regarding low self-esteem and communication anxiety were evaluated alongside field notes documenting actual student participation patterns during lessons.
- Self-reported learning strategies (such as dictionary use and peer group tasks) were verified by observing how those methods were executed in the classroom.

By ensuring that themes emerged from multiple independent data sources, the researcher reduced individual bias and significantly enhanced the confirmability of the study's outcomes.

### Data Analysis Protocol (Thematic Analysis)

The qualitative data were analyzed using the thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2018). This process uses an inductive approach to move systematically from specific, raw text segments to broad, conceptual themes (Merriam, 2009). The analysis followed six distinct phases:

Verbatim Transcription → Initial Code Generation → Searching for Sub-Themes



1. **Familiarization:** The researcher transcribed all audio recordings verbatim and read the transcripts repeatedly alongside the observation field notes to gain a deep understanding of the text.
2. **Generating Initial Codes:** Raw text segments detailing opportunities, challenges, or strategies were labeled with open codes (Creswell, 2018). For example, comments regarding irregular spellings were coded as *Orthographic Exceptions*.
3. **Searching for Sub-Themes:** Related codes were grouped into broader categories, such as linking *Orthographic Exceptions* and *Homophonic*

*Confusion* under the category *Syntactic and Spelling Rules*.

4. **Reviewing Themes:** The candidate themes were checked against the raw dataset and observation field notes to ensure accurate representation.
5. **Defining and Naming Master Themes:** The categories were organized into three master empirical themes: Socio-Cognitive Opportunities, Structural/Intrapersonal Challenges, and Pedagogical Strategies.
6. **Producing the Narrative Result:** The final analysis was woven into Chapter 4, pairing the conceptual themes directly with uncorrected participant excerpts to maintain empirical transparency.

### Identity Safeguarding and Pseudonym Protocol

To maintain strict confidentiality, an explicit pseudonym system was applied across all transcriptions, data tables, and narrative summaries:

- **Teachers:** Coded as **T1, T2, T3, T4, and T5**.
- **Student Focus Groups:** Coded by group as **FGA** (Class VII cohort) or **FGB** (Class VIII cohort), with individual numbers assigned to specific speakers (e.g., *FGB1, FGA2*).
- **Classroom Observations:** Audited class sessions were designated as **CL-2 and CL-3**.

### Trustworthiness of the Study

To establish academic rigor without using quantitative indicators, this study followed the qualitative criteria for trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

- **Credibility (Internal Validity):** To ensure the findings accurately reflect the participants' true perspectives, the researcher used **member checking**. Transcribed interview texts were returned directly to the participants to verify their accuracy. Furthermore, all research instruments were reviewed by academic supervisors before beginning fieldwork.
- **Dependability (Reliability):** A **pilot study** was conducted with a small group before the formal data collection period. Feedback from the pilot test was used to refine the clarity of the questions and ensure consistency in data collection.
- **Confirmability (Objectivity):** The researcher maintained a detailed audit trail and minimized personal bias by using data triangulation, ensuring that all interpretations are grounded directly in the participants' unedited quotes and observed behavioral facts.
- **Transferability (External Validity):** While qualitative case results from a single institution cannot be generalized statistically, the researcher provides highly detailed descriptions of the school setting, classroom layout metrics, and regional dynamics. This comprehensive contextual data allows future researchers to determine if the findings are applicable to similar secondary educational settings within Bhutan.

## Ethical Considerations

Given the presence of minor students within the sample, ethical protocols were strictly maintained throughout the research process (Creswell, 2014):

1. **Administrative Clearance:** Institutional permission was secured by obtaining formal clearance from the Dean of Research and Industrial Linkages (DRIL), followed by written approvals from the Chief Dzongkhag Education Officer of Samtse and the school Principal (see Appendices E, F, and G).
2. **Informed Consent and Assent:** Before beginning the interviews, detailed information sheets were provided to all participants (see Appendix B). Written informed consent was secured from the teachers and the parents of the participating minors, alongside voluntary student assent forms (see Appendix C).
3. **Minimizing Institutional Disruption:** To respect the school environment, all focus groups and individual interviews were conducted after formal instructional hours. The only exceptions were the classroom observations, which were scheduled in advance to minimize disruption to lesson delivery.
4. **Data Protection:** All transcribed documents, field notes, and digital audio recordings are stored securely in encrypted folders and will be retained exclusively for academic validation purposes.

## Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the qualitative methodology used to investigate English language learning and teaching dynamics within a middle secondary school in Samtse Dzongkhag. Grounded in a constructivist paradigm and executed through an exploratory case study design, this study collected data from five teachers and twelve students using individual interviews, focus groups, and direct classroom observations. By implementing data triangulation and following Braun and Clarke's (2018) thematic analysis steps, the study ensured analytical rigor while strictly protecting participant identities. The empirical findings produced through this methodology are presented in detail in Chapter 4.

## Findings and Discussion

### Introduction

This chapter presents the qualitative findings gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and direct classroom observations. The empirical data were analyzed using the thematic analysis procedures propounded by Braun and Clarke (2018). The findings are structured chronologically around three emergent master themes: **Socio-Cognitive and Economic Opportunities, Structural and Intrapersonal Challenges, and Pedagogical and Autonomous Learning Strategies**. To preserve the empirical authenticity of the dataset and capture true linguistic profiles, raw excerpts and participant quotes are presented with their original syntactical and grammatical errors uncorrected.

### Socio-Cognitive and Economic Opportunities

The qualitative analysis revealed that English language acquisition yields multi-dimensional benefits for both educators and learners. These benefits cross multiple functional domains: cognitive

growth, transnational networking, labor market expansion, professional development, and higher educational mobility.

### Cognitive Flexibility and Humanistic Growth

The data indicates that shifting away from strict mechanical repetition toward active interaction with literature enhances critical thinking and provides essential life skills. Rather than acting as a rigid technical subject, target language study serves as a medium for divergent thought processing. Teachers observed that literary text interpretation expands cognitive boundaries:

*"The English subject is a language and not a technical subject where we have to abide by the laws and facts. Since we teach language, children can open themselves to various imaginations, interpretations, and justifications."* (T1)

Furthermore, exposing students to a diverse literary curriculum (poetry, short stories, and novels) offers cross-disciplinary benefits:

*"wealth of ideas, life lessons, and philosophical concepts"* (T4)

This perspective was strongly reinforced by the student cohorts. Participants consistently reported that narrative themes directly influenced their real-world problem-solving skills and positive behavior modification:

*"In English class, I like the stories, poem and essay that give us life lesson, which help me in taking positive step to solve or deals with the problem."* (FGB4)

*"English lessons enable abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of life through life skills contend like empathy, critical thinking, and coping with emotion that is taught in different themes in the curriculum."* (FGA2).

### Transnational Networking and Global Citizenship Culture

Participants broadly identified English proficiency as an indispensable currency for cross-border communication and cultural bridge-building. Learners highlighted its utility for international communication:

*"The benefits of learning English include the ability to speak with people from other nations, as well as the ability to converse with them and understand more about their cultures."* (FGA5)

From the educators' standpoint, English serves as the primary medium for participating in digital scholarly spaces, exploring web domains, and handling international email correspondence. This capacity for cross-cultural social bonding was clearly summarized by T3:

*"Speaking English or having a common language allows us to connect and form bonds with people from all cultural backgrounds."* (T3)

Beyond basic social networking, language skills were framed as crucial social capital for international business and global civic integration. Learner FGB1 explained that English serves as an essential career alternative during economic uncertainty:

*"I like learning English because English is the language of the business world. If I fail in my studies or am unable to find work, I intend to pursue a career in business. I am sure effective communication makes a difference in our business. People who lack these language abilities may not be in a position to influence and maintain intrapersonal relationships, which may be the assets of business."* (FGB1)

This direct link between shared linguistic frameworks and international civic awareness was emphasized by T3:

*"Sharing common language in the world contributes to global citizen too, with people aware of and understands the wider world, and their place in it." (T3).*

### **Macro-Economic Career Perspectives and Professional Development**

Competency in the target language was heavily associated with broader labor choices and systemic upward mobility. The data shows that English fluency functions as a structural requirement for global hiring, granting candidates a clear competitive advantage over monolingual applicants. Learner FGB1 noted its role in overcoming localized job scarcity:

*"Your work options may be limited if you only speak your first language. When you speak English, you will be able to hunt for work outside of your own country, significantly expanding your job market. When career opportunities in our country are scarce, the ability to look outside our borders is really beneficial. Similarly, if you enjoy travelling to new places, having a work offer to get you there is a significant benefit." (FGB1)*

This view aligns with the structural patterns observed by teachers within corporate operational frameworks:

*"Companies are growing increasingly international, and English is becoming a requirement for an increasing number of jobs. Some businesses now perform all of their operations in English, regardless of where they are located throughout the globe. Learning English is an excellent option if we want to get the best paying jobs."(T4)*

*"Learning English provides more options to live in and transform one's entire future pursuing to new employment opportunities that were previously unavailable. It has an advantage over an equally skilled candidate who speaks only one language." (FGB2)*

For the teaching cohort, English serves as an immediate vehicle for self-directed professional advancement ( $n=3$  out of 5 teachers). Access to open-source multimedia tools, international research publications, and online credentialing options enables educators to move beyond static curricular boundaries:

*"The best aspect of teaching English is that there are so many resources available online, and our sessions can be about anything. We can use music, videos, and audios to teach. Unlike other subjects, I don't feel we're confined. We can get information and keep up with our career. That is the aspect of teaching this subject that I enjoy the best." (T1)*

*"If you are from an English-speaking background or graduated from English medium school, you can provide or receive professional services online. Many people obtain credentials as a result of taking online courses. It is their professional progress, not the credential that is crucial." (T2).*

### **Global Educational Opportunities**

A large portion of the sample linked an English-medium academic background directly to international higher education paths. Teachers reported that linguistic mastery remains a prerequisite for completing postgraduate research degrees abroad:

*"We have a decent chance of studying outside of the nation because of our English background. Because of their strong English backgrounds, the majority of our colleagues are pursuing master and doctoral degrees in foreign nations. As a result, I*

*believe that being fluent in English has numerous advantages in one's life." (T2)*

This structural path was supported by the student focus groups, who noted that English acts as a primary vehicle for educational growth:

*"Expand our educational opportunities beyond our own country." (FGA2).*

### **Structural, Organizational, and Intrapersonal Challenges**

The empirical data indicates that despite high interest in English, the learning process is hindered by language rules, institutional limits, individual setbacks, and negative interpersonal interactions.

### **Syntactic Non-Phonetic Exceptions and Orthographic Discrepancies**

Educators and students face clear cognitive obstacles due to irregular spelling systems, complex syntactic rules, and non-phonetic pronunciation styles in English. Teachers expressed the difficulty of justifying these exceptions to young learners:

*"Exceptional rules in grammar, spelling and pronunciation make very difficult for teachers in teaching and to convince learners." (T5)*

*"One of the biggest challenges for me personally, I feel, is the sophisticated rules that apply to structuring sentences. I mean, mostly in grammar and also in understanding some of the words that aren't pronounced the same way as they are written. So far, I have somewhat adjusted to the exceptions to the grammar that come almost with every rule. However, I think I will take some time to adapt and understand why. For example, we spell c-o-l-o-n-e-l for a military officer but we pronounce it as 'kernel'. Similar things happen when people say "pony rhymes with bologna rhyme." (T1)*

Students face similar difficulties when attempting to memorize abstract, rules-heavy grammar frameworks:

*"Grammar is difficult for me since I have to memorize all of the rules with exceptions" (FGB5)*

These orthographic challenges are worsened by words that share identical text structures but change pronunciation based on grammatical tense:

*"Since English is not a phonetic language, we don't always say words the same way they are written. "I shall read the book today," and "I read the book yesterday," for example, are spelled similarly but pronounced differently and also there are words which spelled the same but differ in meaning and pronunciation. These are some of the several words that can be perplexing to English learners." (T4)*

This spelling confusion causes students to default to direct word-for-word native language translation, which severely restricts their vocabulary development:

*"Children have trouble understanding concepts because they lack vocabulary, reading habits, and mainly they try to translate directly from their native language." (T5).*

### **Organizational Barriers and Resource Bottlenecks**

Data from the teacher interviews ( $n=4$  out of 5) identified several institutional limitations that reduce teaching quality, including high student density, resource shortages, dense curricula, and heavy schedules.

**Table 1: Observed Classroom Density and Structural Limitations**

Observation Code	Confirmed Class Size	Documented Physical & Structural Constraints
CL-2	37 Students	Limited floor space; restricted student movement; narrow walkways.
CL-3	41 Students	Overcrowded seating; limited teacher mobility; difficult room layout for peer collaboration.

Educators noted that these physical constraints directly lower the classroom's effectiveness as a learning environment:

*"Bhutanese classrooms are extremely cramped and congested. I believe it is not an exaggeration to say that Bhutanese classrooms are extremely overcrowded. In truth, there isn't even enough room for the feet to step in because it's that crowded. It affects mobility in the classroom in various ways, and when the number of students in the class is too high, it becomes difficult to focus. I believe it is critical to consider class size while attempting to make learning more impactful and effective." (T1)*

Resource limitations further compound these layout issues. A lack of printing access and limited technology spaces restrict the use of helpful media and supplementary materials:

*"Lack of resources and facilities is one of the challenges we encounter because while teaching literature pieces, we need to provide a lot of examples and samples for the students, but the resources for printing facilities are very scarce. We could not use the ICT lab either, as the school has only one lab which is booked for ICT classes." (T5)*

Additionally, high workloads (**25 to 29 periods per week at 50 minutes per period**) leave teachers with minimal time to plan lessons or grade assignments. This time crunch makes it difficult to cover a broad curriculum that requires grading four language strands alongside six literature units:

*"Having to complete six units in literature with grammar lessons, as well as assessing all four strands with a variety of exercises, impedes the efficiency of our work." (T4).*

### **Personal Setbacks and Affective Filter Variables**

Individual hurdles include minimal exposure to English, weak independent reading habits, low self-esteem, and communication anxiety. Teachers observed that missing reading logs reflect low literacy engagement outside of school:

*"We have no reading or speaking habits, and learning from reading, speaking, and listening is, regrettably, quite bad as a result of these factors, which creates obstacles and negative consequences. It has become a barrier, posing a challenge to students learning English in the classroom. It is clearly visible in the reading log that the students kept for their assessment." (T2)*

A lack of educated role models in the home environment further decreases regular target language exposure:

*"If a child is exposed to a different language or learning environment while he is in school or away from his school. If there is someone who is modelling and who is grooming the kid, especially when the parents are educated and reside in an*

*atmosphere exposed to many learning environments... he/she will learn better..."(T2)*

This lack of exposure causes students to rely heavily on their first language (L1) during peer group work, which directly reduces opportunities for target language practice:

*"Overuse of L1 deprives students of valuable exposure to the target language (English), chances of learning English would be slim." (T3)*

*"Students speaking in other languages in class, particularly their mother tongue Nepali obstruct their ability to communicate." (T3)*

This reliance on L1 is reinforced by psychological anxieties. Fear of negative evaluation from teachers and peers often leads to passivity during lessons:

*"I am very self-conscious about speaking in front of others; I can do it with my friends but not with a large group; I can shout at my friends and curse them, but when there is a teacher present, I am afraid that she will judge me incorrectly or that she will have a different perspective on me. I worry that she will remember it for a long time, lowering my level of confidentiality" (FGB1)*

Direct classroom observations confirmed this passive behavior, showing that participation was low unless teachers explicitly called on specific student names or roll numbers, with the same small group of confident students volunteering throughout each lesson.

### **Interpersonal Barriers and Social Pressures**

Sociolinguistic challenges occur when peers or family members criticize students for practicing English outside the classroom. Students reported that using English around friends or siblings was often misinterpreted as arrogance:

*"I don't speak much English in front of my friends and family because they believe I'm bragging and my siblings despise me when I do. My friends don't want to talk in English with me because they think I'm bossy, and instructor scolds us for not doing our homework, it's not because I don't want to do it; it's because I don't know what to ask, and I'm afraid of them." (FGB1)*

This problem is exacerbated by a lack of coordinated language practice across other subjects, leaving the burden of language development entirely on English teachers:

*"The third challenge is a bigger one, maybe I am expected to teach them the rules, but we should also understand that they have been learning the rules... so for me I believe it's greater than the role of the single English teacher. Because in the classroom we teach them the structure, rules and many more but the very next period another teacher enters the class and speaks the line that I just said isn't correct. So, the students are confused." (T1)*

Furthermore, punitive disciplinary measures—such as removing students from the classroom for incomplete homework—create unhelpful friction and cause students to miss out on core instruction:

*"I dislike missing classes because teachers chastise us and send us outside if we don't complete our work, and they also force us to complete homework outside of class." (FGB3)*

Finally, a lack of parental guidance and home support often discourages students from practicing independently through media tools:

*"My parents don't like it when I speak English often, but I enjoy it and learn it through watching English movies. I attempt to imitate the conversation from movies to speak like them (Englishmen), but they (parents) think I'm just watching TV instead of doing my homework." (FGB1).*

### Pedagogical Interventions and Learning Strategies

To manage these institutional and personal challenges, both teachers and students employ distinct, proactive strategies.

#### Independent Student Learning Strategies

Students rely heavily on autonomous strategies to expand their vocabulary and improve their reading comprehension, using digital tools, dictionaries, libraries, and multimedia channels.

*"To facilitate my English learning, I read as many books as I can and increase my vocabulary, if I come across difficult words I directly use the dictionary and internet to understand the word easier and I read poem to help me with my understanding and improve my English." (FGA2)*

*"I utilize the library as my primary source for English learning, but I also use social media since there are interesting items to read that have helped me improve my language." (FGB4)*

Students also use popular media like YouTube, movies, and music to learn natural pronunciation patterns and idiomatic expressions that are missing from standard textbooks:

*"I learn English from English movies, YouTube and listening to others, besides the classroom teaching and prescribed texts. As a result, I improve my grammar, and pronunciation." (FGB1).*

#### Teacher-Led Instructional Strategies and Classroom Interventions

Educators deploy several targeted strategies to encourage participation, reduce anxiety, and improve core reading and writing skills.

**Table 2: Mapping Teacher Interventions to Learning Challenges**

Specific Pedagogical Strategy	Target Skill Domain	Intended Learning Outcome
Cooperative Learning Groups	Interpersonal / Speaking	Distributes cognitive load, lowers individual anxiety
Enactment & Dramatic Roleplay	Oral Fluency	Builds verbal confidence through practical application
Writing Process & Portfolios	Compositional Layout	Encourages revision through ongoing feedback
Targeted Prefix/Suffix Sub-rules	Orthography / Spelling	Demystifies non-phonetic vocabulary structures
Repetitive Writing Correction	Accuracy / Mechanics	Fixes frequent spelling mistakes immediately
Model Reading Exercises	Phonics / Auditory	Demonstrates natural pronunciation and rhythm
Adaptive Lesson Customization	Remediation / Differentiation	Adjusts pacing to match student performance levels
Structured Book Reviews & Logs	Literacy / Writing	Encourages independent reading and summary skills

Cooperative group work was widely cited as a key strategy for lowering the psychological barriers created by a large classroom environment:

*"I utilize the cooperative learning method because it allows every student in the class to collaborate and contribute. No one on the team is left out when it comes to expressing or clarifying their thoughts on the topic. It is the strategy that helps to improve each of the four strands." (T5)*

Students confirmed that cooperative learning helps them feel more comfortable sharing ideas by giving them clear roles before they have to speak in front of the whole class:

*"My teacher uses group work or cooperative learning practices. It facilitates proper information sharing among group members as well as inside the class. To begin with, it prepares us for the position of either writer or presenter. It encourages learners to communicate with one another while also improving their speaking abilities and interpersonal relationships. No student is left out of*

*the conversation, and all suggestions are collected for a brighter presentation.*" (FGA2)

To keep lessons engaging, teachers introduce contemporary multimedia materials like popular songs to teach structural devices like rhyme schemes and metaphors, while enforcing target-language boundaries during class time:

*"I make an effort to include the activities that I find fascinating. Instead of providing them a poem that takes a long time to interpret even for native speakers, I chose to give them a song that is common, new, and play it for them, then give them the lyrics and ask them to check the rhyming pattern, sound device, or metaphor employed in the song and etc. Furthermore, we have a rule requiring pupils to speak English at least in English class."* (T1)

To improve structured composition skills, teachers use a multi-draft writing process supported by reflective journals and portfolios:

*"I follow educational guidelines for writing, such as keeping a writing log or maintain portfolio, written following the writing process and making numerous drafts. I also urge students to write at least one or two paragraphs using the steps of the writing process in every day lesson, and I check providing constructive feedback. Aside from that, I encourage students to keep their journal writing too."* (T4)

When dealing with recurring spelling errors, teachers pair prefix and suffix rules with immediate, high-repetition corrections:

*"I make sure students understand the basic prefix and suffix principles, as well as how words are produced, when it comes to spelling. And, after I have explained everything, if they still make mistakes, they must rectify it. I make them instantly write the word with the incorrect spelling ten times and show it to me."* (T1)

To improve pronunciation and decoding skills, teachers rely heavily on model reading exercises:

*"I constantly undertake reading exercises in class. First, I do the reading for the students, and then I have them follow along with me while I read a particular paragraph or topic. Then I helped each pupil come up with their own reading material to read to the class."* (T4)

To keep motivation high, educators share their own personal reading journals and encourage students to build a genuine interest in books:

*"When I initially start a class or begin a new academic year, I emphasize to the students the importance of falling in love. And I tell them that they must fall in love with books and then value reading as a means for acquiring knowledge, learning new language skills, acquiring new information, and becoming wise and knowledgeable people. To encourage them to read, I used my own experience by displaying my reading journal."* (T1)

Finally, teachers regularly adjust their lesson plans and use extended activities to balance the needs of struggling learners with those of high achievers:

*"If the first lesson did not go well, I changed my lesson plans. To re-teach them, I vary the learning activities as well as the strategies."* (T5)

*"I implemented interventions such as keeping a reading log, writing book reviews, and providing critical feedback on the books they read."* (T5).

## Summary

The findings confirm that while English acquisition provides valuable cognitive skills, professional paths, and educational opportunities, the learning process faces clear structural difficulties. These include non-phonetic spelling rules, congested classrooms, heavy teacher workloads, and the psychological anxiety of making mistakes in public. To address these bottlenecks, teachers and students use a variety of strategies—ranging from cooperative group tasks and portfolio tracking to independent digital learning tools—to improve classroom engagement and target language proficiency.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

### Introduction

This final chapter presents the conclusion, pedagogical implications, localized limitations, and institutional recommendations derived from the empirical findings of this study. This research was initiated to explore the multi-perspective perceptions of teachers ( $n=5$ ) and students ( $n=12$ ) regarding English language acquisition within a Middle Secondary school context in Samtse Dzongkhag. Guided by a qualitative design situated within the constructivist paradigm, data collected via semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and direct classroom observations were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2018) thematic analysis framework. This chapter synthesizes these empirical insights to offer actionable pathways for curriculum implementation and systemic educational reform.

### Conclusion

#### Socio-Cognitive Growth and Literary Engagement

The study demonstrates that targeted English language acquisition significantly develops students' cognitive flexibility when instructional practices move beyond mechanical repetition to engage actively with literary texts. Rather than serving merely as a static technical tool, the secondary English curriculum expands critical thinking, cultivates divergent imagination, and provides adaptive life skills (such as empathy, problem-solving, and emotional coping mechanisms). This literacy exposure sharpens the learner's awareness, broadens their lived experiences, and encourages them to make independent judgments, allowing them to navigate real-world situations with greater socio-cognitive maturity.

#### Macro-Economic Utility and Professional Labor Mobility

Empirical evidence indicates that target language proficiency serves as vital social and economic capital within both national and global labor markets. Competency in English is perceived by teachers and students as an essential requirement for career entry, corporate growth, and financial security. By lowering cross-border communication barriers, English proficiency expands career choices beyond localized fields, granting bilingual candidates a distinct competitive advantage in international commercial spheres and preparing them for global citizenship.

#### Syntactic Exceptions and Orthographic Constraints

Conversely, the learning process faces significant challenges stemming from the non-phonetic structural rules and irregular spelling systems inherent in English. Middle secondary school learners face considerable cognitive difficulty navigating complex syntactic configurations, irregular verb variations, and homophonic

words. These challenges often lead to recurring errors in spelling, pronunciation, and sentence structure, causing students to default to direct mental translation from their first language (L1). Consequently, language instruction demands explicit, systematic attention from educators to help students demystify these grammatical exceptions.

### **Institutional, Resource, and Physical Classroom Bottlenecks**

A major finding of this study highlights the presence of critical organizational barriers that slow language instruction. Documented classroom densities (**ranging from 37 to 41 students per room**) severely limit physical movement, reduce individual teacher-student interactions, and hinder the setup of communicative group tasks. This spatial crowding, compounded by restricted printing access, limited digital tools, a dense literature curriculum, and heavy teacher schedules (**25 to 29 instructional periods per week**), reduces overall teaching efficiency. This proves that the physical classroom layout directly affects language production outcomes.

### **Intrapersonal Affective Filters and Sociolinguistic Pressures**

Individual hurdles—including lack of target language exposure outside school, regular reliance on the mother tongue (Nepali/Dzongkha) during collaborative tasks, and low self-esteem—create strong psychological barriers for learners. Fear of negative evaluation by teachers and peers causes many students to remain passive listeners, which limits their oral fluency. These internal anxieties are worsened by sociolinguistic pressures at home and negative peer feedback, which often frame practicing English outside of class as an act of cultural arrogance.

### **Pedagogical Alignment and Methodological Strategies**

Finally, the study confirms that using balanced, deliberate strategies is essential for effective language development. Using cooperative learning groups, portfolios, dramatic roleplay, and structured media tools helps lower student anxiety, bypass learning weaknesses, and increase participation. A welcoming, supportive classroom climate paired with proactive independent strategies (such as using dictionaries, digital media, and extensive reading habits) helps students manage the structural difficulties of the language and builds long-term target language proficiency.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the empirical insights generated by this study, the following actions are recommended for key educational stakeholders:

### **For the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD) & Policy Stakeholders**

- **Class Size Optimization:** Review administrative policies to gradually optimize student teacher ratios in regional secondary schools, ensuring classrooms do not exceed a standard capacity conducive to active communicative language teaching (CLT).
- **Resource Redistribution:** Direct specific infrastructure funding toward upgrading digital laboratories and printing facilities in remote Dzongkhags like Samtse, ensuring teachers have the physical tools to print and use supplementary media.

### **For School Principals and Institutional Administrators**

- **Workload Rationalization:** Adjust internal teaching schedules to reduce weekly lesson periods, granting language teachers adequate time to plan multi-draft writing feedback and organize targeted reading interventions.
- **Cross-Curricular Language Policies:** Implement school-wide initiatives where non-language subject teachers reinforce correct English usage, reducing student confusion and distributing the language development workload across the faculty.

### **For Language Educators and Classroom Practitioners**

- **Systemic Literacy Interventions:** Implement structured reading and writing routines—such as *Drop Everything and Read (DEAR)* and *Drop Everything and Write (DEAW)*—to counter weak reading habits and give students low-stakes opportunities to practice.
- **Mitigating Anxiety:** Replace highly punitive disciplinary actions (such as removing students from class for incomplete work) with positive, peer-supported group reviews and constructive feedback to lower psychological barriers and build self-esteem.

### **Directions for Future Research**

- **Demographic Expansion:** Future studies should focus on older student cohorts (such as Class XI and XII), who possess the advanced vocabulary and analytical confidence to share deeper linguistic experiences.
- **Geographic and Quantitative Scalability:** Since this study was limited to a single secondary institution in Samtse Dzongkhag, future research should use larger mixed-method designs across multiple Dzongkhags to provide a comprehensive, national view of language education in Bhutan.

## **Limitations of the Study**

While this study offers valuable localized insights, several limitations must be acknowledged:

1. **Sample Size and Contextual Limits:** The small sample size ( $n=5$  teachers;  $n=12$  students) drawn from a single secondary school prevents statistical generalization across all schools in Bhutan.
2. **Participant Demographic Constraints:** The learner cohort consisted entirely of young students in Classes VII and VIII, who occasionally demonstrated limited vocabulary or hesitation when expressing complex linguistic anxieties during interviews.
3. **Verification Baselines:** Because this is one of the earliest qualitative studies exploring specific, multi-perspective language perceptions in Samtse Dzongkhag, there is a lack of regional baseline literature against which these specific qualitative findings can be cross-verified.

## **Summary**

This study highlights the clear connection between English language proficiency and a student's cognitive, professional, and educational growth. However, achieving this proficiency is slowed by a combination of complex language rules, crowded classrooms,

heavy teacher workloads, and the social anxiety of making mistakes. Addressing these bottlenecks requires coordinated, structural support from all educational stakeholders. By lowering class sizes, providing essential printing and digital tools, and building supportive classroom environments, schools can help Bhutanese students build the language proficiency needed to access global opportunities.

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