

Delving into the Professional Development Experiences of Women English
Language Teachers in Nepal

Ganga Laxmi Bhandari

A Dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in English
Education

Submitted to
Graduate School of Education
Office of the Dean
Faculty of Education
Tribhuvan University
Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Nepal

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Faculty of Education
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A Dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in English Education

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Abstract

An abstract of the dissertation presented by Ganga Laxmi Bhandari for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Education on July 18, 2025, with the title 'Delving into the Professional Development Experiences of Women English Language Teachers in Nepal', approved by



Professor Binod Luitel

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Professional development for English language teachers has received increasing attention in recent years, as English language teaching in non-native contexts requires ongoing training, exposure and updates on new teaching methods. In Nepal, opportunities for such professional growth are limited, which affects all teachers. Women English language teachers face additional social and structural barriers that further restrict their access to these opportunities. Despite this, their experiences remain underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining the challenges and opportunities women English language teachers encounter in community schools and the strategies they use to pursue professional development in male-dominated and resource-constrained environments. Drawing on sociocultural theory, feminism, the capability approach, and patriarchy theory, the study explores how these teachers perceive their professional growth, access resources, overcome barriers and navigate challenges in English language teaching.

The study has applied a phenomenological research design, specifically hermeneutic phenomenology, which emphasises interpreting lived experiences in context. It is based on the experiences of 14 secondary-level women English language teachers of community schools in the Kathmandu Valley, each with a minimum of

five years of teaching experience. Data were collected through two rounds of in-depth interviews and informal conversations. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and complemented by detailed field notes. Thematic analysis, guided by the theoretical frameworks, was then conducted to interpret the data.

Findings reveal that women English language teachers regard professional development as a crucial pathway to personal empowerment and agency, enabling them to challenge the constraints imposed by patriarchal systems. However, this pathway is obstructed by systemic violence rooted in patriarchy, manifesting as symbolic and discursive violence, epistemic injustice and cognitive rigidity, particularly among male colleagues. Teachers from moderate-income families, where domestic responsibilities are shared more equitably, tend to experience greater professional success than those from wealthier, traditionally patriarchal households. The school environment also significantly influences their experiences. Some schools foster collegiality, reflective practices and interpersonal support, while others perpetuate gender discrimination in various forms.

Government-sponsored training programmes emerged as the primary resource for professional development, though they are often theoretical and disconnected from practical classroom realities. Supplementary opportunities come from non-governmental initiatives and self-directed learning, including online resources and external training programmes. Access to these alternative modes is, however, uneven. Owing to domestic responsibilities and heavy workloads, women English language teachers often face difficulties in engaging with these alternative modes of professional development.

This study contributes to understanding how women English language teachers in Nepal navigate professional growth amid patriarchal and resource

limitations. It offers fresh insights into gender dynamics within the country's education system by highlighting the pivotal role of family support, teacher self-confidence, and proactive, gender-sensitive school leadership. The findings call for a reorientation of professional development programmes to incorporate the unlearning of patriarchal biases, the promotion of gender-sensitive teaching practices and the facilitation of work-life balance. Finally, it underscores the need for further multi-stakeholder and geographically diverse research to deepen understanding of the factors that shape both the professional development and ELT practices of women English language teachers in Nepal.

शोधसार

गैर मातृ भाषी-सन्दर्भमा सहज अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा शिक्षणका लागि विकसित भइरहेका नियमित तालिम, अवलोकन भ्रमण तथा शिक्षण विधिसम्बन्धी नयाँ-नयाँ अभ्यासहरूका बारेमा अद्यावधीकरण आवश्यक हुन्छ । अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा शिक्षकहरूको पेसागत विकासका लागि अपरिहार्य देखिएका अवसरहरू हामीकहाँ सीमित छन् । यो सीमितताले सबै शिक्षकहरूलाई प्रभावित गर्दछ । पितृसत्तात्मक सामाजिक तथा संरचनात्मक व्यवधानसँग जुध्दै अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा शिक्षणमा संलग्न महिला अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा शिक्षकहरूका लागि यसको प्रभाव थप घनिभूत हुन्छ । यो सबालमा महिला अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा शिक्षकहरूको भोगाइ कस्तो छ त्यसमाथि पर्याप्त अनुसन्धान र अन्वेषण भइसकेको छैन । यस पृष्ठभूमिमा आधारित यस अध्ययनमा सामुदायिक विद्यालयमा कार्यरत महिला अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा शिक्षकहरूका पेसागत चुनौतीहरू र अवसरहरू सम्बोधन गर्न तिनले अपनाएका उपायसम्बन्धी अनुभवलाई पेसागत विकासको बहसको मूलधारमा ल्याउन पहल गरिएको छ ।

सामाजिक-सांस्कृतिक सिद्धान्त, क्षमता विकास, नारीवाद र पितृ सत्तासम्बन्धी अवधारणालाई मार्गदर्शक सिद्धान्तको रूपमा अनुसरण गरी गुणात्मक शोध विधिअन्तर्गत घटनाअनुक्रियात्मक (फेनोमेनोलोजिकल) पद्धतिका आधारमा गरिएको यस अध्ययनले काठमाडौँ उपत्यकाका १४ सामुदायिक विद्यालयहरूमा कार्यरत कम्तीमा पाँच वर्ष अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा शिक्षण गरिसकेका महिला शिक्षकहरूका अनुभव र धारणाको सङ्ग्रह र विश्लेषण गरेको छ ।

यो अध्ययनका लागि अनौपचारिक छलफल तथा दुई चरणमा आयोजित गहन अन्तर्वार्तामार्फत तथ्य सङ्कलन गरियो । तथ्य भण्डारण तथा विश्लेषणका लागि दुवै चरणमा अन्तर्वार्ताको रेकर्ड गरी रेकर्डको अनुलेखबाट त्यसलाई अनौपचारिक छलफल तथा अन्तर्वार्ताका क्रममा टिपोट गरिएको नोटसँग तुलना गर्दै थप प्रशोधन गरियो ।

त्यसपछि अध्ययनका लागि प्रयुक्त सैद्धान्तिक रूपरेखाको आधारमा तथ्यको विषयगत विश्लेषण गरियो ।

महिला अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा शिक्षकहरूको व्यक्तिगत सशक्तीकरण र क्षमता अभिवृद्धिका लागि पेसागत विकास अपरिहार्य हुन्छ भन्ने यो अध्ययनको निष्कर्ष रहेको छ । यो अध्ययनले पितृसत्तात्मक मूल्य प्रणालीले सृजना गरेका व्यवधानलाई प्रतिरोध गर्ने कौशल र क्षमताको विस्तारलाई पेसागत विकासको अभिन्न अङ्ग बनाइनु पर्छ भन्ने मतलाई स्थापित गरेको छ । पितृसत्तात्मक मूल्य निर्देशित सामाजिक-सांस्कृतिक वातावरणमा महिला अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा शिक्षकहरूको पेसागत विकास चुनौतीमुक्त भने छैन । घरायसी कामको भार, महिलाहरूका आवाज, भोगाइ र आवश्यकताको अन्देखा तथा उपेक्षा (साङ्केतिक तथा विमर्शात्मक हिंसा) गर्ने विद्यालय प्रशासन तथा आफ्नो अनुभव र ज्ञान नै पूर्ण हो भन्ने पुरुष शिक्षक साथीहरूको मनोविज्ञान महिला अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा शिक्षकहरूको पेसागत विकासमा बाधक देखिएको छ ।

घरायसी कामको बाँडफाँड गरिने मध्यम-आय परिवारका महिला शिक्षकहरू सम्पन्न तथा पितृसत्तात्मक चिन्तन बोक्ने परिवारका महिला शिक्षकहरूको तुलनामा पेसागत विकासमा बढी सफल पाइएको छ । त्यस्तै शैक्षिक उन्नयनसम्बन्धी आन्तरिक छलफल, विमर्श तथा अनुभव आदान-प्रदानका लागि खुला वातावरण प्रदान गर्ने विद्यालयका महिला शिक्षकहरूको पेसागत विकासको अनुभव अन्य विद्यालयका महिला शिक्षकहरूको भन्दा सकारात्मक छ ।

सरकारले प्रदान गर्ने पेसागत विकास तालिम शिक्षक पेसागत विकासको प्रमुख माध्यम हो । सैद्धान्तिक विषयहरूमा बढी केन्द्रित भएका कारण यो तालिम परिवर्तन भइरहने कक्षाकोठाका आवश्यकताहरूको व्यावहारिक सम्बोधनका लागि भने त्यति उपयोगी छैन । गैर सरकारी क्षेत्रका निकायहरूले प्रदान गर्ने तालिम, स्वअध्ययन, अनलाइन सामग्रीहरू तथा बाह्य निकायले प्रदान गर्ने तालिमहरू पेसागत विकासका

सहायक माध्यम पाइएका छन् । घरायसी तथा शैक्षिक-प्रशासनिक कामको दोहोरो भारका कारण यी अवसरहरूको पर्याप्त उपयोग भएको पाइन्न ।

यो अध्ययनले पितृसत्तात्मक सामाजिक चिन्तन तथा स्रोत-साधनको सीमितताका बिच नेपालका महिला अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा शिक्षकहरूले कसरी आफ्नो पेसागत उन्नयन गरिरहेका छन् भन्ने उजागर गरेको छ । यस क्रममा देशको शैक्षिक प्रणालीभित्रको लैङ्गिक गतिशीलताको ताजा अवस्था प्रकाशमा आएको छ । पारिवारिक सहयोग, महिला शिक्षकको आत्मविश्वास तथा लैङ्गिक संवेदनशीलतासहित शैक्षिक समस्या समाधानमा सक्रिय विद्यालय नेतृत्व महिला अङ्ग्रेजी शिक्षकको पेसागत विकासका लागि अपरिहार्य हुन्छन् भन्ने नवीन पक्ष स्थापित भएको छ । शिक्षक पेसागत विकाससम्बन्धी कार्यक्रमहरूको पुनर्अभिमुखीकरण गरी तिनमा पितृसत्तात्मक पूर्वाग्रहहरू बिसर्प, लैङ्गिक संवेदनशील शिक्षण प्रवर्धन गर्ने तथा व्यक्तिगत र पेसागत जीवनको सन्तुलन मिलाउने सिप र कौशल विकास गर्ने विषय-सूची थप्नु पर्ने अध्ययनको मूल निष्कर्ष छ । त्यस्तै यस अध्ययनले महिला अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा शिक्षकहरूको पेसागत विकास र अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा शिक्षण अभ्यासलाई प्रभावित गर्ने कारकहरूको गहिरो तथा विस्तृत जानकारीका लागि देशको भौगोलिक विविधतासहित सबै साझेदारहरू समेटिने थप अनुसन्धानको आवश्यकतामा जोड दिएको छ ।

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled 'Delving into the Professional Development Experiences of Women English Language Teachers in Nepal' submitted to the Graduate School of Education, Faculty of Education, Tribhuvan University, Nepal for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), is my original work and has not been submitted in part or in full for any other degree to any other Universities.


.....

Ganga Laxmi Bhandari

June 22, 2025 (2082/03/08)

This is to certify that Ganga Laxmi Bhandari, a PhD candidate at the Graduate School of Education (GSE), has finalised her dissertation entitled 'Delving into the Professional Development Experiences of Women English Language Teachers in Nepal' under my supervision, after addressing the comments and corrections suggested by external evaluators.

I hereby recommend her dissertation for final evaluation as part of the viva process.



Prof Binod Luitel, PhD


Supervisor

June 22, 2025 (2082/03/08)


This dissertation entitled 'Delving into the Professional Development Experiences of Women English Language Teachers in Nepal' by Ganga Laxmi Bhandari has been approved for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education.



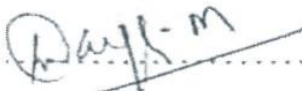
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Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|--|
| BEd | Bachelor of Education |
| CEDAW | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women |
| CEHRD | Centre for Education and Human Resource Development |
| CEO | Chief Executive Officer |
| CERID | Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development |
| CoE | College of Education |
| DIRD | Dynamic Institute of Research and Development |
| DoE | Department of Education |
| EAWEP | Equal Access of Women to Education Project |
| EFL | English as a Foreign Language |
| ELT | English Language Teaching |
| EPM | Education Planning and Management |
| FOE | Faculty of Education |
| ICT | Information and Communications Technology |
| IEd | Intermediate in Education |
| IoE | Institute of Education |
| MEd | Master of Education |
| MoE | Ministry of Education |
| MoESC | Ministry of Education, Science and Technology |
| MoEST | Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology |
| MoF | Ministry of Finance |
| MoWCSC | Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens |
| MPhil | Master of Philosophy |

| | |
|--------|--|
| NASP | National Education System Plan |
| NCED | The National Centre for Educational Development |
| NELTA | Nepal English Language Teachers Association |
| NESP | National Education System Plan |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PD | Professional Development |
| PhD | Doctor of Philosophy |
| RELO | Regional English Language Office |
| SESP | School Education Sector Plan |
| SLC | School Leaving Certificate. |
| SMC | School Management Committee |
| TPD | Teacher Professional Development |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |

Chapter One

Introduction

This dissertation examines the professional development (PD) experiences of women English language teachers in Nepal. It does so by exploring the interplay of patriarchal societal structures, limited resources and teachers' agency in pursuing professional growth within the context of English Language Teaching (ELT). Using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, informed by sociocultural theory, feminism, patriarchy and the capability approach, the study reveals the challenges and opportunities these teachers face in enhancing their ELT practice.

English language teaching in non-native contexts like Nepal is challenging (Hasanah & Utami, 2019; Jayachandran, 2021). Teachers need regular opportunities for training, exposure and refresher courses to stay updated on pedagogical, theoretical, and administrative developments. In Nepal, such opportunities are limited. It affects all English language teachers, but its impact is particularly strong for women teachers, who navigate teaching amid patriarchally influenced social and structural challenges (Bhatta, 2023; UNESCO, 2000; UNESCO, 2001). Their experiences have not been sufficiently studied. This research engages women English language teachers of the Kathmandu Valley to address this gap. The findings highlight that professional development is not only a tool for empowerment but also a pathway to improving ELT outcomes, while also identifying systemic and structural barriers that obstruct progress. These insights offer valuable implications for educational policy and practice in resource-constrained and gender-unequal contexts.

This chapter, Chapter 1, lays the foundation for the study. It begins with a personal reflection on my professional journey in the field of ELT, which inspired this PhD research. The chapter then contextualises the research problem by surveying the

conceptual foundations of teacher professional development and its significance in ELT. The chapter then presents a clear statement of the research problem, articulates the significance of the study vis-à-vis English language teaching, outlines its objectives, and poses the central research questions. Additionally, it defines key terms and delineates the scope of the study to ensure clarity. By establishing this groundwork, the chapter connects its components to the broader narrative and contributions of subsequent chapters.

Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the philosophical and methodological delimitations and provides an outline of the focus and organisation of the remaining chapters.

Setting the Scene for the Study: Personal Reflection

My journey towards a PhD on the professional development of women English language teachers in Nepal has been shaped by a combination of personal experiences, academic pursuits and professional engagements in the field of education, particularly in English language teaching (ELT), and gender equality. Over the years, I have worked closely with women teachers, principals and educational administrators. In the process, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges they face in achieving professional growth. These experiences have motivated me to investigate further the challenges and obstacles women English language teachers encounter, particularly in Nepal's community schools and have inspired my commitment to finding solutions through research.

My interest in pursuing a PhD stems from my background as a woman raised in a traditional, patriarchal society. Growing up in Kurule Tenupa, a remote village in Dhankuta, I was the youngest of three children in a Brahmin family. My father, a Nepali and Social Sciences teacher, was the primary breadwinner, while my barely

literate mother managed the household and agriculture. Despite my mother's traditional upbringing, I never felt confined by gender norms at home. All three of us—my two older brothers and I—were treated equally and given the same opportunities in education, socio-cultural participation and personal expression. However, outside our family, the realities were different.

My first encounter with gender-based discrimination came at school. During my primary education, I was one of just seven or eight girls in a classroom of around 30 students. As we progressed through the grades, societal pressures led many of my female classmates to drop out. In the end, only my aunt and I, both of us supported by educated male guardians, completed lower secondary school.

The school, too, was not gender-conscious. By failing to recognise the social and cultural discrimination between boys and girls and neglecting its role in addressing this discrimination, the school indirectly reinforced it. Girls would receive discouraging feedback if they failed to answer a question correctly or submit homework on time. A common response to such a scenario would be “you girls are good only for domestic work, not for study.” By such remarks, the teachers would reinforce the gendered worldview of the society in schools. This would add to the social perception that education was not for girls.

There were other forms of indirect discrimination. They would be seen in discourses and work divisions between boys and girls. For instance, girls were required to scrub and clean the school and fetch water for teachers from nearby wells. These roles mirrored those assigned within patriarchal households. No boys were expected to perform these tasks and no one would question why the boys were spared from these roles.

After completing grade seven, I moved to Damak with my brother to continue my studies. This marked a turning point in my understanding of gender roles. Away from home and my parents, I had to take responsibility for preparing food, as a girl and a sister. My brother, three years older, would assist me but never take the lead. At around 12 years old, I was undertaking dual roles: pursuing my education while fulfilling my gendered obligations. It was here in Damak that I realised the difference between being a son and a daughter, a boy and a girl. As a girl, I felt a social obligation to cook and prepare meals, although no one obliged me to do so, likely due to the patriarchal influences surrounding me.

After seven months in Damak, we were transferred to Shree Sharada Secondary School in 6 Number Budhabare, where my father was a teacher. The difficulties in managing our scattered family, split between Damak, Kurule Tenupa and 6 Number Budhabare, were the reason for our transfer. Here, the environment was more encouraging and equal. Girls were encouraged to study and received additional attention if they showed potential for development. They were also encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities, which were otherwise considered the domain of boys.

In 6 Number Budhabare, the teaching-learning environment was different. It is here that I was introduced to English grammar, writing and composition. Until then, I had no idea that learning English would include these areas. In Kurule Tenupa and Damak, English teaching was largely confined to the dictation of possible exam questions and their answers, which were primarily aimed at passing examinations. We used to copy what the teachers wrote on the blackboard and memorise them word for word without a clue of what the words meant. I still recall the difficulty I faced for many years to rectify the spelling of 'driver,' which had been dictated to us as 'diver.

It was perhaps a teacher's typo. At the time, however, we had no way of knowing the difference between 'driver' and 'diver.'

In 6 Number Budhabare, too, the Grammar-Translation Method was the primary teaching method. Nepali was the medium of instruction. Translating texts, memorising grammar rules and learning vocabulary were the primary ways of learning. However, both teachers and students were active participants. The teacher often engaged us in small practical tasks, such as making sentences using a given word in a particular tense, reading an assigned paragraph and answering questions. He would also ask us to write a composition on events like 'Dashain' or 'jatra.' All this was quite new to me and a very different experience. Looking back, I realise this was the difference between a teacher trained in English language teaching and one without such training. The teacher in 6 Number Budhabare had a BEd in English teaching. Although his focus was exclusively on reading and writing and not on the listening and speaking components, his input and guidance were very helpful in passing the SLC examination. The lack of emphasis on listening and speaking has, however, had far-reaching consequences. Even today, I find myself hesitant to speak as fluently as I can write.

After passing my SLC, a rare achievement for girls at the time, I enrolled in Dhankuta Multiple Campus for my Intermediate of Education (IEd), majoring in English and Nepali. I followed the advice of my father and teachers to pursue a career in teaching, which was also my area of interest. At the Campus, the use of English as the medium of instruction was a significant challenge. My limited background in English, especially in listening and speaking, made it difficult to understand lectures and to ask questions when lectures were unclear. Nevertheless, I completed my IEd and later earned a Bachelor of Education (BEd) in English and Nepali. Alongside my

studies, I became interested in liberal politics, which broadened my worldview and empowered me to question traditional gender roles and societal expectations from that time.

After completing my BEd, I married a teacher from a rural village in Dhankuta. I wanted to complete an MEd in English education immediately, before entering an English teaching career. For this, we had to move to Kathmandu, which was not immediately possible. Managing the transition from Dhankuta to Kathmandu took some years. It led to a momentary pause in my academic journey. This transition was not easy. We had to consider how to sustain both our living expenses and the cost of education in the capital.

Three years after our marriage, my spouse secured a job at a non-governmental organisation in Kathmandu. With renewed hope for further education to become a trained English teacher, we relocated to Kathmandu. However, before I could enrol in the MEd in English programme at the Faculty of Education, Tribhuvan University, we welcomed our first child. When I finally gained admission, I entered the programme as a mother-student. Then on, I had to balance the dual responsibilities of parenting and academic study. It was an immensely challenging period. Taking care of my child took precedence, while my educational pursuits became secondary. As a mother, I had no other choice.

My spouse had limited time for domestic responsibilities, as he was adjusting to a new profession and working long hours. Since his job was our only source of income, his time and priorities could not be adjusted. I struggled to attend classes regularly and often relied on classmates' notes to study at home. There were moments when I felt like giving up. However, with the unwavering support and encouragement from my spouse and other family members, I persevered and eventually completed

my MEd in English. Soon after, I began my teaching career at Mahendra Ratna Campus in Tahachal.

The early years of my teaching career were equally challenging. At Mahendra Ratna Campus, I received no formal orientation to the system of educational administration and other professional concerns, such as the number of students, their level of language competency, the psychological environment shaped by student organisations, the composition of English language teachers and the broader relational dynamics within the campus. An orientation to these issues would have helped a new entrant to adapt psychologically and created a supportive environment for English language teaching. But this was not the case. I was left on my own to find my way. This absence of structured induction left me struggling for nearly a year to navigate these challenges, which could have been entirely avoided through a half-day induction. The absence was the result of such processes not being recognised as essential components of teacher professional development.

Meanwhile, our family responsibilities grew as we welcomed our second child. Managing life with two young children left me with little time or energy to focus on improving my teaching practices. For nearly two decades, I remained occupied with balancing my roles as a teacher and caregiver, with limited motivation and opportunities for academic growth. During this period, informal learning occurred only sporadically and was insufficient to enrich my knowledge and teaching approaches significantly.

For many years, my English language teaching was completely limited to the course book and classroom interactions with students. If any confusion arose, I had no one to turn to for a formal suggestion. I could have consulted fellow English language

teachers. But I had not yet understood the level of collegiality within the campus. The uncertainty of how I would be received discouraged me from approaching them.

In the first year of my teaching—five or six months after I joined the campus—I noticed a gradual decline in the number of my students in the class. The trend both alarmed and confused me. It prompted me to ask the students why their classmates were gradually absent. “Because you only speak English.” A student hesitatingly said, “They go to other classes where English is taught in Nepali.” My formal training had oriented me to strictly use English as a medium of instruction. The classroom reality, especially the language competence of my students, proved it untenable. Following this incident, I changed my instructional practices to use both English and Nepali as mediums of instruction. This disconnect between formal training and classroom realities shaped my initial academic orientation towards teacher professional development. I wanted to explore how professional learning can address contextual challenges and equip teachers to deal with them.

In the meantime, in 2011 and 2012, I had an opportunity to participate in two interconnected training courses facilitated by the Regional English Language Office (RELO) of the US Government and delivered by the American English Institute at the University of Oregon, USA. The opportunity came my way as a member of the Nepal English Language Teachers’ Association (NELTA). The programme combined online training in Critical Thinking for the English Language Teaching Curriculum with a subsequent in-person E-Teacher Scholarship Professional Development Workshop, which brought together selected participants (of the online course) from around the world. Listening to the narratives of women English language teachers, particularly the challenges they faced in their professional contexts, sensitised me to the complex intersections of gender and English language teaching. This exposure became an

important impetus for my research on the experiences of Nepali women English language teachers. A few years later, when my children had grown up and I was appointed as a permanent lecturer, I was able to pursue an “MPhil leading to PhD” programme, with the question and curiosity from the Professional Development Workshop, the first event that systematically engaged me in teacher professional development issues.

These experiences—of negotiating family responsibilities, societal expectations and professional aspirations—have profoundly shaped the trajectory of my research. They have strengthened my conviction that investigating the professional development of women English language teachers in Nepal is not only of academic relevance but also of personal significance. Through this study, I seek to contribute to the broader discourse on educational development in Nepal, with a particular focus on English language teaching, the field in which I am professionally engaged.

Over the years, I have developed a sustained interest in the intersection of gender, education and professional development, which I now seek to advance through my PhD research by situating it within relevant theoretical frameworks. Against this background, the study examines how women English language teachers in Nepal deal with the constraints of societal norms while pursuing their professional growth. In doing so, it seeks to generate insights that not only enhance scholarly understanding of gendered experiences in English language teaching but also contribute to the formulation of more inclusive policies and practices aimed at enhancing the professional development of women teachers.

Contextualisation of the Research

The professional development of teachers in Nepal has evolved over several decades. It began with the establishment of the Basic Education Teacher Training Centre in Kathmandu in 1948, which aimed to train primary teachers (Awasthi, 2003, p. 17). Six years later, in 1954, the Nepal National Education Planning Commission recommended dissolving this centre to establish the College of Education to train lower secondary and secondary teachers. Concurrently, Mobile Normal Schools operated to provide six- to nine-month training programmes for primary teachers until they were converted into Primary School Teachers' Training Centres in 1963 (Awasthi, 2003; Wood, 1965).

A significant turning point came with the National Education System Plan (NESP) of 1971. While its overarching goal under the panchayat system was to cultivate citizens loyal to the crown, the plan emphasised teacher training as a means to develop human resources essential for national progress (Ministry of Education [MoE], 1971). This emphasis laid a foundation for future educational reforms.

In the same year, the Equal Access of Women to Education Project (EAWEP) was launched with the goal of increasing girls' participation by producing and recruiting women teachers (Bista, 2006, p. 1). This early initiative marked an important recognition by policymakers that educational reform could not succeed without integrating women into the teaching workforce.

Following this, subsequent educational plans and legislation introduced women-specific scholarships and training programmes aimed at boosting girls' enrolment and increasing the number of trained female teachers across Nepal (Paudyal, 2013). Since the 1990s, particularly after democracy was restored, numerous laws, policies and programmes have been institutionalised not only to build

women's capacity and agency but also to tackle the structural roots of gender discrimination. These efforts reflect Nepal's evolving commitment to gender equality.

Nepal has integrated international instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals into its constitution and legal frameworks (MoWCSC, 2020). This shows a deliberate effort to harmonise domestic priorities with global gender equality norms. Legislative reforms like the Gender Equality Act (2006), the Domestic Violence (Offence and Punishment) Act (2009), the Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention) Act (2015) and the Constitution of Nepal (2015) are the results of this effort. Collectively, these instruments reinforce Nepal's global obligations to promote gender justice and equality at home (MoWCSC, 2020).

Such international standards highlight that discrimination against women hinders their educational advancement and leadership development, and obstructs their broader social and economic progress. They establish minimum global expectations for governments and guide national legal and policy reforms to address these challenges (Hellum & Aasen, 2013).

The School Education Sector Plan (SESP) (2023–2032), which is Nepal's long-term strategic education plan, reflects an ongoing effort to translate policies into practice. The Plan aims to “develop and implement a comprehensive teacher professional development system ... and streamline the system to improve the motivation and accountability of teachers” (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2022, p. xi). This signals a growing recognition that sustainable educational transformation depends on the quality and empowerment of

teachers across all subjects, including English, which is prioritised alongside science and mathematics.

Government assessments of the SESP's precursors, such as the School Sector Development Programme, indicate some positive outcomes, including increased student enrolment (notably of girls), reduced dropout and repetition rates, diminished gender discrimination and a better female-to-male teacher ratio (MoEST, 2022; Ministry of Finance [MoF], 2018). Supporting these observations, MoWCSC (2020, p. 28) reports that girls' net enrolment at the primary level rose from 64.6% in 2000 to 93.3% in 2017, with tertiary enrolment increasing from 2.3% to 12.4% in the same period. Between 2014 and 2018, the ratio of female to male teachers at the primary level improved from 41.9% to 44.6% (MoWCSC, 2020, p. 28). This improvement is attributed to targeted training and educational incentives.

While these improvements do not directly measure the professional development of women teachers, they indirectly signal empowerment trends that support professional growth. This pattern reflects a broader societal recognition of the multiplier effect of women's education and professional engagement in promoting inclusive development.

Among women teachers, those teaching English face unique challenges and opportunities shaped by the global and local significance of English and the socio-cultural context in which they operate (Bhatta, 2023). To gain a nuanced understanding of these dynamics, focused research is needed on the lived experiences of women English language teachers. Such insights not only enrich academic knowledge but also inform the reform of educational system, both broadly and within the specific domain of English language teaching in Nepal.

Women teachers play a crucial role in reducing social inequality and gender disparity. They act as role models for girls, encourage school attendance, lower dropout rates, and protect girls from exploitation within schools (Francis & Skelton, 2005; UNESCO, 2006). When women enter the profession as English language teachers, their impact can be more significant. English proficiency offers economic opportunities and social prestige in many South Asian contexts. Erling's (2014) regional study highlights that English skills are highly valued in South Asia, as they provide social and economic value and prestige. Bhatta (2023) extends these findings by demonstrating how English has enhanced the agency of women English language teachers in Nepal by boosting their confidence and enabling them to assume leadership roles in schools and communities.

In this context, English education is not only a linguistic asset. It is also a powerful tool for empowerment. Mastery of English strengthens women's agency and broadens their participation in public life, especially in patriarchal societies like Nepal. As Esch (2009) and Poudel (2017) note, English fluency contributes significantly to women's confidence, leadership capacity and social status. In male-dominated educational settings, these factors are important to enhance professional equality of women.

In recent years, academic interest in these issues has grown. Researchers have examined how women teachers, particularly English language teachers, relate these developments to their professional lives (Dahal, 2023; Gurung-Pradhan, 2018; Khadka, 2020; Paudyal, 2013; Sitaula, 2023). Teacher professional development as a general topic has also been studied (Gnawali, 2013; Rijal, 2013; Shah, 2015). Their findings have also been relevant to understanding women teachers' professional growth.

These studies indicate progress in the professional development of women English language teachers and also identify persistent challenges. Shah (2015) points to procedural and managerial obstacles, such as training opportunities being urban-centric and, thus, inaccessible to rural teachers. The Department of Inspection and Research and Development (DIRD, 2018) further notes that many school environments do not support the practical application of skills acquired through training.

Rijal's (2013) PhD research revealed that most English teachers had no opportunities to discuss or define their professional development needs. School environments functioned in a top-down manner that limited teacher participation. There was no opportunity for progress review, feedback or exposure visits to other institutions.

Five years later, educational experts studying teacher professional development reached similar conclusions. Despite efforts like induction training and provision of self-learning resources, these measures remained ineffective due to the absence of a clear, institutionalised policy framework addressing systemic issues (DIRD, 2018).

While these constraints affect all teachers, women experience them more intensely. Gendered socialisation, socio-economic marginalisation and patriarchal school cultures compound the challenges faced by women in education and capacity building (Bhatta, 2023; Decoteau, 2016; Fitzsimmons et al., 2014; Khanal, 2018; Kharel, 2019; UNESCO, 2000).

This disproportionate impact is substantiated by national data that reveal significant gender disparities in teaching positions, especially at higher levels of the education system. According to the Centre for Education and Human Resource

Development (CEHRD) under MoEST, Nepal has 265,231 teachers across community and institutional schools from grades one to 12 (CEHRD, 2023, pp. 49–52). Of these, 106,777 are women (40%) and 158,454 are men (60%). Women's participation is higher at the Basic Level (grades 1–8) at 46%, but drops sharply to 19% at the Secondary Level (grades 9–12) (CEHRD, 2023, pp. 50–52). At the university level, women's participation is estimated to be below 10% (Baral, 2023).

These figures reflect not only a declining trend in women's participation at higher educational levels but also raise critical questions about the structural and cultural barriers that hinder their advancement into leadership roles. Empirical studies provide further insight into this gap. For instance, in a mini-study of public schools in Kathmandu, I found that women-led schools demonstrated better management and performance (Bhandari, 2019). This finding resonates with Joshi Pant's (2024) study of women heads of community schools in Kathmandu, which were internally inclusive and participatory and maintained a good public rapport externally. However, as the women heads recounted, it is difficult to enter the leadership role and, after entry, one has to face numerous difficulties everyday just because the leader is a woman. These experiences reinforce broader evidence that in gender-unequal contexts, women often struggle to be heard, recognised and valued, regardless of their positions, and face even greater barriers when they aspire to higher roles (Rai, 2019; UNDP, 2014).

A recurring theme in the literature discussed above is that women face systemic obstacles in advancing their educational careers and leadership roles. Despite decades of political commitment to non-discrimination, equality and inclusion in education, important questions remain regarding how these ideals translate into practice, especially for women English language teachers. This study seeks to explore

an answer to these questions through women English language teachers' ideas, perspectives and lived experiences.

Statement of the Problem

The contextual realities discussed above point to a gap between policy intentions and the lived experiences of women English language teachers. Despite increased global and national attention to teacher professional development (TPD), women English language teachers—particularly in low- and middle-income countries—continue to face systemic challenges that hinder their professional growth. In Nepal, these challenges are further worsened by deeply entrenched gender norms, limited institutional support and the absence of context-sensitive TPD programmes. This situation is especially troubling given that well-supported women teachers not only enhance instructional quality but also work as important agents in promoting girls' education, reducing dropout rates and enhancing inclusive and equitable learning environments (Eble & Hu, 2020; Jackie, 2006; UNESCO, 2000; Ventista & Brown, 2023). Professional development in English language teaching offers women teachers additional advantages. These include economic empowerment, social identity and recognition and psychological satisfaction (Erling, 2014; Esch, 2009). Taken together, these factors contribute to more effective English language teaching, which in turn supports better learning outcomes, including improved language proficiency and more inclusive classroom practices.

Although TPD can occur through both formal and informal processes—including workshops, mentoring, peer collaboration and critical reflection (Crandall & Finn, 2014; Johnson & Golombek, 2011; McLeod et al., 2020)—Nepal's education system offers limited access to such avenues, particularly for English language teachers in public/community schools. When available, these opportunities are often

poorly aligned with the everyday realities of classroom teaching and community-based challenges (DIRD, 2018; Farrell, 2012; Rijal, 2013). For women teachers in general—and especially for women English language teachers, who require greater investment of resources compared to teachers of other subjects—the barriers are even more intense. Societal expectations, domestic responsibilities and gendered workplace dynamics restrict their time, mobility and self-efficacy. Together, they severely limit their ability to engage in meaningful TPD (Kadel, 2022; Kharel, 2019; UNICEF, 2022).

While some research in Nepal has explored aspects of professional development of women English language teachers—such as teacher attitudes (Shrestha, 2015), identity formation (Khadka, 2020), process and utilisation of TPD opportunities (Sapkota, 2017), the inclusion-exclusion dynamic (Paudyal, 2013), the perceptions of and motivation to professional development (Gurung-Pradhan, 2018) and job satisfaction as a teacher (Gurung, 2022)—these studies tend to be fragmented and under-theorised. The intersection of gender and subject specialisation creates a distinct set of challenges for these teachers, making it necessary for a more focused investigation. Positioned within a complex educational landscape, these teachers must navigate the global prestige and professional expectations of English language teaching alongside the constraints imposed by entrenched patriarchy and rigid institutional hierarchies.

This dual challenge—between the empowering potential of English and the disempowering constraints of gendered structures—remains underexplored. English, often associated with economic mobility, modernity, and social prestige, can enhance the professional agency of women teachers. Yet, in practice, the systemic limitations they face undermine their ability to access, apply and benefit from PD opportunities.

As a result, their professional journeys are shaped not only by pedagogical or institutional concerns but also by broader socio-cultural forces that have not yet been adequately addressed in research and policy.

In response to these intersecting challenges and research gaps, this study investigates the lived experiences of women English language teachers, focusing on their perceptions of professional development, the constraints they face, the coping strategies they have adopted, and their recommendations for reform. In doing so, it offers a contextually grounded and theoretically informed contribution to research, policy and practice. Drawing on sociocultural theory, gender-justice frameworks—including feminist critiques of patriarchy—and the capability approach, the study deepens understanding of how broader structures shape women's professional development and agency in ELT. It ultimately contributes to building a more equitable and gender-just education system, both in general and specifically within the ELT sector, in Nepal.

Rationale of the Study

This study is driven by the critical need to investigate the professional development experiences of women English language teachers in Nepal. This is a group navigating a complex educational landscape shaped by socio-cultural and systemic factors. Its rationale is rooted in theoretical, practical and policy-driven imperatives that underscore the research's academic and societal necessity.

Theoretically, the study integrates sociocultural theory, feminism, the capability approach and patriarchy theory to conceptualise professional development as a transformative process. Sociocultural theory, through Norton's (2013) framework of learning as identity and investment, positions professional development as a means for women teachers to renegotiate their identities within a patriarchal society.

Feminist theory highlights the need to address gendered structures that hamper women's professional agency and advocate for systemic change (Crenshaw, 1989; Hooks, 2000). The capability approach frames professional development as a pathway to expanding teachers' freedoms to pursue their professional goals (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999). Patriarchy theory explains how power dynamics in Nepalese society and schools shape women's professional opportunities (Walby, 1990). This multi-theoretical lens provides a strong foundation for analysing women teachers' agency and identity, and contributes to a deeper understanding of gender dynamics in education.

Practically, the study addresses the need for inclusive professional development systems that empower women teachers. Building on the challenges outlined in the Statement of the Problem, it employs a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to capture the nuanced lived experiences of women English language teachers in community schools in the Kathmandu Valley. By centring their perspectives, the research seeks to generate actionable recommendations to enhance pedagogical effectiveness and foster inclusive educational environments, thereby supporting teachers' professional growth.

The policy imperative for this study aligns with Nepal's commitments to gender equality and educational reform, as articulated in the School Education Sector Plan (SESP) (2023-2032) and international frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (MoEST, 2022; MoWCSC, 2020). These frameworks prioritise equitable access to professional development to empower women educators and improve educational outcomes. This study aims to inform evidence-based policy

reforms by identifying gaps in the implementation of the policy frameworks and advocating for gender-responsive educational systems.

Academically, the research enriches the discourse on gender and education by offering a comprehensive exploration of women teachers' professional development. Its hermeneutic phenomenological approach ensures analytical depth by capturing the interplay of agency and structural constraints. The findings advance theoretical understandings of teacher development in gendered contexts and provide a foundation for future research, policy design and practice to foster a more equitable educational landscape in Nepal. In particular, the study contributes to the field of English Language Teaching by emphasising the socio-cultural and gendered dimensions of language teacher development in under-researched contexts. By centring the lived experiences of women English teachers, it enriches ELT scholarship with contextually grounded insights into how identity, agency and structural barriers interrelate to shape pedagogical practices and professional growth.

Objectives

The main objective of the study was to explore how women English language teachers are developing themselves professionally in the face of constraints and challenges at home as well as in the work setting. The exploration begins with the stocktaking of the current challenges and obstacles being faced by women English language teachers and moves to the issues and areas featured in the specific objectives.

Specific objectives of the study were to:

- a. explore professional development opportunities experienced by women English language teachers in Nepal

- b. analyse women English language teachers' efforts to respond to obstacles and constraints related to their professional development in ELT.
- c. draw meaning from the lived experiences of challenges and barriers to the professional development of women English language teachers in the context of English language teaching.

Research Questions

The research was conducted to seek answers to the following questions.

- a. How do women English language teachers explain their knowledge and experiences about professional development?
- b. How do they view the resources and opportunities available for their professional development as ELT practitioners?
- c. How have they experienced gaps, challenges and obstacles to their professional development within the context of ELT?
- d. How have women English language teachers dealt with those challenges and obstacles?
- e. How do they perceive ways to improve their professional development environment in the English language teaching sector in future?

Delimitations of the Study

This study is delimited by researcher-imposed boundaries to focus on the professional development experiences of women English language teachers in community schools in the Kathmandu Valley. These delimitations span theoretical, thematic and perspective boundaries, as outlined below.

Theoretical Delimitation: The study is framed within a multi-theoretical framework drawing on sociocultural theory (Norton, 2013), feminism (Crenshaw,

1989; Hooks, 2000), the capability approach (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999) and patriarchy theory (Walby, 1990), which collectively shape the analysis of female English language teachers' professional development in their social and cultural context. It does not engage with theoretical perspectives such as behaviourism, cognitive learning theories, or economic rationalism that focus on individual traits, stimulus-response mechanisms or market-based explanations of professional development. These perspectives are deliberately excluded to maintain a focused analysis on gender, agency and socio-cultural dynamics.

Thematic Delimitation: This study focuses on themes directly related to teachers' perceptions, the barriers they encounter, the strategies they employ and their recommendations for improvement. It does not examine other relevant themes, such as curriculum design, student academic outcomes or institutional policy frameworks, which fall outside the immediate experiences of teachers.

Perspective Delimitation: This study focuses exclusively on the experiences of women English language teachers in the Kathmandu Valley. It does not address the professional development experiences of male teachers, women English language teachers from other regions or the perspectives of other stakeholders in the school education system, such as school administrators and management committee members.

Definitions of the Key Terms

The key terms used in the study have been defined as follows.

Agency: The term *agency* is closely related to *empowerment*. However, empowerment is broader and relates to an outcome (improvement) while agency refers to process. Agency refers to the capacity of individuals to act and make decisions about their lives and environments independently. It involves the ability to

set goals, take initiative and navigate challenges, often in the face of structural or societal constraints. In the context of women English language teachers, agency enables them to challenge traditional norms, pursue professional growth and contribute to broader social change primarily through teaching.

Childhood habitus: Childhood habitus refers to the deeply ingrained mindsets and worldviews that are shaped by family, culture and community influences during early childhood. These mindsets are unconsciously internalised. They subtly influence an individual's orientations, tastes, attitudes and decisions throughout their life. Shaped by factors such as class, gender and ethnicity, childhood habitus reflects the power dynamics embedded in society.

Cognitive rigidity: Cognitive rigidity is an inflexible way of thinking, sticking to established patterns and resisting new perspectives. It can limit problem-solving, creativity, open-mindedness and the ability to embrace new ideas.

Community schools: The schools that receive regular government grants to cover teacher salaries and administrative costs are community schools. In this study, the term specifically refers to the 14 schools in the Kathmandu Valley from which I collected data by interviewing one teacher from each school.

Discursive violence: Discursive violence, in this context, refers to the use of language and discourse to assert power and dominance over women English language teachers. It manifests through dismissive, derogatory or exclusionary language that aims to silence and marginalise the voices of women teachers. This form of violence denies them space and opportunities in educational settings. As a result, it perpetuates harmful stereotypes that hinder their professional development. Ultimately, discursive violence limits their chances for recognition, growth and career advancement.

Epistemic injustice: The term refers to a state of discrimination among individuals and groups about knowledge, understanding and participation in communication. The injustice arises when certain voices are excluded, silenced, ignored, misrepresented and marginalised, while others are given more authority and credibility. Epistemic injustice highlights the structural inequalities that hinder equitable participation in knowledge production and communication.

Feminism: The term refers to an ideology that advocates for political, economic, social, and cultural equality between men and women. It challenges systems of patriarchy and gender-based discrimination while emphasising women's rights, empowerment and agency.

Gender justice: The concept refers to fair treatment and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities and rights for individuals of all genders. At the centre of the concept is to address and rectify inequalities and discrimination based on gender, and enable everyone to fully participate in society and access the same rights and opportunities irrespective of their gender identity.

Gender stereotypes: Gender stereotypes are generalised beliefs or assumptions about the social roles deemed appropriate for individuals based on their gender. These stereotypes dictate how men and women should think, act, behave and feel, and, thus, reinforce traditional notions of masculinity and femininity.

Gendered socialisation: The phrase refers to the process of learning and internalising gender-related cultural norms, behaviours and roles through various agents, such as family, peers, education and media, as part of upbringing. It reinforces societal expectations of women and men throughout their lives, and shapes their identities and outlooks toward gender roles, relationships, career choices and social participation.

Human rights: Human rights are the fundamental rights and freedoms that belong by birth to every individual, regardless of nationality, sex, ethnicity, religion or any other status. These rights include civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights that give everyone dignity, equality and respect.

International instruments: In this document, international instruments refer to human rights laws providing frameworks, standards and guidelines for the protection and promotion of human rights at the global level.

Patriarchy: It is a social system in which men hold primary power and dominance in terms of political leadership and decision-making, social privilege and control of property. It often results in the subordination of women and the reinforcement of traditional gender roles, perpetuating inequalities in various aspects of life, including family, workplace and society.

Structural barriers: This expression refers to systemic obstacles that hinder women's access to rights, resources and opportunities. These barriers are mostly unseen, embedded in the policies, laws, practices and cultural norms of institutions and society. Often, they make it difficult for women to achieve equality and participate fully in various aspects of life.

Supportive culture: In the context of the professional development of women, the term refers to an environment that actively promotes gender equality, inclusion and empowerment in the workplace or professional settings. The main characteristics of such culture include mentorship support, flexible work arrangements, respect and recognition of women's contributions and collegiality.

Symbolic violence: Symbolic violence refers to the humiliation, devaluation and marginalisation of certain groups—women, in the context of this study—by those in power or in proximity to power. This type of violence is imposed without physical

force, primarily through discriminatory practices, such as lack of appreciation or recognition and denial of opportunities, which often occur without explicit articulation. It is often subtle and unconscious and is tolerated and accepted by the victims. In doing so, the victims become a part of their own oppression.

Teacher professional development: Teacher professional development is a continuous process of enhancing teachers' skills, knowledge and practices through both formal and informal learning opportunities, such as academic training, workshops, peer collaboration, reflective practices and exposure to new ideas. It also involves unlearning traditional habits and worldviews that may hinder the adoption of innovative approaches and skills.

The Hermeneutic Circle: This term refers to an iterative process of understanding and interpreting data by repeatedly revisiting and refining it. As different sections or chapters come together, this interplay between the parts and the whole deepens insight through continuous interaction. As a result, the end product becomes as informed, rich and complete as possible.

Chapter Organisation and Overview

The dissertation is organised into seven chapters. Each chapter is divided into sub-sections as necessary. This first chapter introduces the contextual background of the study, including conceptual fundamentals as well as procedural contents ranging from the statement of the problem and the objective of the study to the main research questions and the study's delimitation.

The second chapter presents a review of the literature about the professional development of women English language teachers and related concerns, both in global and national contexts. The review, divided into relevant sub-themes, looks at

both substantive and theoretical issues, focusing on what knowledge already exists for the study to tap into and what gaps there are for the study to strive to address.

The third chapter discusses the methodological foundations and frameworks of the study. The discussion starts with a brief introduction to paradigmatic issues and orientations, and moves to epistemological considerations and the rationale behind them. It then discusses the research method of the study, the research tool that has been used, the participants that have been engaged in the study and the procedures that have been followed to collect and analyse data. There is also a brief discussion on the ethical norms that have been used and abided by throughout the course of the research.

The fourth chapter dwells on the presentation and analysis of the data collected from the participants with the aim of laying the foundation for the analytical chapter that follows. Analysis and presentation are done based on interview transcripts of each participant, field notes of the researcher and paraphrased and verbatim reporting of the data collected in line with the main research questions under relevant sub-themes.

The fifth chapter—the chapter on discussion and findings—aims to find answers to the main research questions by triangulating the primary data with the secondary data (the knowledge that exists), and, thus, prepares the ground for the concluding chapter that follows.

The sixth and final chapter of the study presents the overall conclusion, summarises the findings in relation to the theoretical guideposts used throughout the research, and offers ideas for future exploration. These ideas are intended to serve as pedagogical implications that can be further investigated to address the underlying

issues related to the professional development of women English language teachers, as suggested by the study.

Chapter Two

Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

This section reviews the literature on the professional development of English language teachers, with a focus on women teachers in Nepal. The review is situated within the broader context of English language teaching and explores key concepts, processes and challenges related to teacher professional development. It emphasises the unique experiences of women teachers, who often navigate patriarchal norms and systemic inequities while pursuing professional growth. The review is guided by sociocultural theory, feminism, the capability approach and patriarchy theory, which, together, provide a framework for understanding the interplay of individual agency, institutional support and structural barriers.

The review is organised thematically to highlight existing knowledge and identify gaps that this study addresses. It begins by contextualising teacher professional development and exploring its definitional and conceptual dimensions. It then examines the themes and perspectives that shape professional development, focusing on the challenges and opportunities faced by women teachers. The final section synthesises the literature and identifies areas for further research.

Contextualising Teacher Professional Development

Teacher professional development encompasses activities and inputs aimed at enhancing teachers' skills, knowledge and expertise, and enables them to serve effectively in their roles (OECD, 2009). This includes both formal training and informal processes like mentoring, collaboration, and reflective practices (Dhanavel, 2022). Its effectiveness, however, depends on its alignment with the socio-cultural context in which the teachers work (Coppe et al., 2024; Day, 1999).

The social milieu of teaching, as described by Fullan (2007), is dynamic, reflecting ongoing innovations and challenges. For women teachers, this milieu is often shaped by gendered socialisation processes that prioritise domestic responsibilities over professional aspirations (Fitzgerald & Crites, 1980). This socialisation forms a habitus—a set of ingrained beliefs normalising male privilege and female subservience—that constrains women’s capacity to challenge patriarchal norms and pursue professional growth (Connell, 2009; Decoteau, 2016; Nash, 2020). Simultaneously, men are often conditioned to prioritise career advancement by perpetuating traditional gender roles and failing to develop their capacity to address inequities (Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 2013).

While TPD is frequently evaluated through its impact on student outcomes, research underscores the need for sophisticated methods to assess its influence on teachers’ practices (Desimone, 2011; Ingvarson et al., 2005). Effective TPD programmes should address the specific challenges women teachers face, such as limited leadership opportunities and societal expectations that undermine gender equity (Gupta et al., 2023; Kunnath, 2023). Overcoming these barriers requires systemic changes and targeted support that extend beyond individual resilience.

Teacher Professional Development: Concepts and Strategies

According to OECD (2009), teacher professional development is any activity or input that enhances teachers’ skills, knowledge, expertise, and other characteristics that enable them to serve effectively in their role. This definition encompasses both formal training and informal processes, such as mentoring, collaboration and reflective practices (Dhanavel, 2022). OECD (2005, p.10) defines TPD “as a continuum” of “teacher education, induction” and needs-based skills training, which are “interconnected to create a more coherent learning and development system for

teachers.” In this system, teachers are expected to work for “individual development of children and young people, the management of learning processes in the classroom [and] the development of the entire school as a ‘learning community’” (OECD, 2005, p.3). This definition underscores professional development as equipping teachers to address both student and school needs.

The discussion above suggests that TPD is a continuous and context-dependent process shaped by multiple factors. According to Cochran-Smith (2003) and Little (1999, cited in Desimone, 2011), it develops through social interactions, which are influenced by broader cultural, social, and political contexts. Poppe et al. (2024) describe this as the micropolitical environment of teacher professional development, highlighting the role of informal power dynamics in shaping teaching processes. Similarly, Fullan (2007) refers to it as the social milieu of teaching, suggesting that the network of social relationships and norms influences how teachers learn and implement it.

Understanding the micropolitical environment—or social milieu—is crucial. It can positively support or negatively constrain the professional development of teachers. For women teachers, the milieu is often constrained by gendered socialisation processes that shape their roles and responsibilities in ways that prioritise domestic duties over professional aspirations (Fitzgerald & Crites, 1980). This socialisation creates a childhood habitus that normalises male privilege and female subservience (Decoteau, 2016; Fitzsimmons et al., 2014).

Such habitus can act as cognitive rigidity, limiting women’s ability to challenge patriarchal norms and pursue professional growth (Connell, 2009; Nash, 2020). For male teachers, this habitus often reinforces traditional gender roles by encouraging them to prioritise career advancement over domestic responsibilities and

perpetuating the expectation that they should dominate leadership positions (Connell, 2005). This dynamic not only restricts women's opportunities but also places undue pressure on men to conform to rigid gender norms within their professional environments (Kimmel, 2013; Messerschmidt, 2018). Thus, the gendered socialisation process affects both male and women teachers, although in different ways, by reinforcing patriarchal structures that hinder equitable professional development for all.

Underhill (1988, cited in Gnawali, 2008, p. 219) insists that the socio-political contexts in which teachers work should encourage them to continuously learn and challenge their own professional growth. This is necessary to motivate them to sustain a spirit of exploration in their careers. The learning and exploration should not only focus on the development of technical skills but also emphasise emotional and social intelligence so that teachers can engage meaningfully with their students.

Popova et al. (2021) enrich the discussion by suggesting that teacher professional development should include three elements: the 'content' (what is offered or taught), the 'method' of delivery (who provides it and how), and the 'design' (how it is structured and on what basis). They assert that 'content' and 'method' should be tailored to address teachers' needs, which can vary based on the policy and school settings in which they work (Day, 1999, p.1). Wood and McQuarrie (1999, cited by Villegas-Reimers, 2003, p.12) further insist that on-the-job learning activities, such as study groups and action research, should form part of professional development. These activities provide opportunities for teachers to learn from real-life exposure. Similarly, Borko (2005, cited in Desimone, 2011) highlights the value of formal and informal discussions among teachers as integral to professional growth and development.

A 'Teaching and Learning International Survey' conducted by the OECD among teachers in Abu Dhabi highlights the importance of "emotional learning needs of teachers" to be part of teacher professional development programmes. This focus enables teachers to understand their students' cultural backgrounds, family contexts and home situations, which is necessary for teachers to teach effectively (Badri et al., 2016, p.11). The study emphasises peer-to-peer collaboration as the most effective professional development tool. It provides opportunities for the participants to interact in a supportive environment. The study's scale and engagement with active teachers make its findings particularly relevant to understanding teachers' emotional aspects as professional development needs.

Similarly, a women-only study conducted among 20 women teachers in northern Israel found that 70% of the participants viewed their peers as instrumental in supporting their career development. School principals and supervisors were described as "ideal images to imitate, to identify with and to look upward to" (Kremer-Hayon, 2016, p.6). However, the study also revealed frustrations stemming from "the conflict and tension between high demands placed on teachers in the intellectual and emotional areas on the one hand, and the low rewards—few chances for promotion, low status, low salaries—on the other" (Kremer-Hayon, 2016, p.8). These findings suggest that professional development is closely tied to school environments, peer relationships, recognition and appreciation of teachers' contributions and reward systems.

To be effective, TPD requires addressing both pedagogical and relational dimensions of teaching. Richards and Farrell (2005) emphasise the importance of reflective practices, peer collaboration and critical engagement with school policies as key components of an enabling professional environment. These dimensions not only

enhance pedagogical skills but also nurture the relational qualities essential for navigating gendered constraints in professional settings. Similarly, Avalos (2011) highlights the transformative nature of TPD, which involves not only learning new skills but also unlearning outdated habits and worldviews. This dual process is particularly relevant for women teachers, who must often overcome internalised beliefs about their roles and capabilities to achieve professional growth, especially in leadership positions (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Gautam, 2018).

Oja (1990), drawing on developmental theories, finds that professional development needs differ according to teachers' developmental stage, their maturity, experience and prior knowledge. Teachers at advanced stages may benefit from collaborative action research, as they possess reflective practices, problem-solving skills and the ability to mentor junior colleagues (Oja, 1990, pp. 1–5). These insights emphasise the need for professional development programmes to account for individual differences among teachers. Furthermore, integrating socio-affective strategies—a strength often associated with women teachers (Saeidi & Khaliliaqdam, 2013; Zeynali, 2012)—can enhance their ability to connect with students, empathise with challenges and build a positive classroom environment. Addressing these gender-specific strengths and challenges in professional development programmes allows for a balanced approach that supports both female and male teachers in achieving their potential.

Self-study also emerges as another significant theme in professional development literature. It serves as a means for teachers to refresh knowledge, address administrative gaps and drive educational reforms at both individual and institutional levels (Kitchen et al., 2020; OECD, 2009; Ovens & Fletcher, 2014; Schulte & Walker-Gibbs, 2016). Korthagen and Lunenberg (2004) underline the importance of

self-study in educational improvement. Self-study, they argue, contributes to teachers' reflective practices, which enable them to critically examine their own knowledge and teaching strategies. Reflection also promotes collaboration and collegiality among teachers, which ultimately enhances their collective professional learning.

The integration of technology into professional development is increasingly recognised as essential. Teachers need training to use technology effectively for both personal growth and classroom teaching. Research underscores that professional development programmes focused on technology equip teachers to connect with students in meaningful ways (Sekano et al., 2023). This aligns with the growing need to adapt teaching practices to the digital age.

Crandall and Finn (2014) propose five characteristics of effective teacher professional development: (a) learning opportunities in a formal context over an extended period, (b) engagement in developing interpersonal sharing skills, (c) challenging assumptions about learning to facilitate new perspectives, (d) creating collaborative learning communities, and (e) ensuring administrative support. These principles align with the evolving needs of teachers and their professional contexts. Building on these insights, Poppe et al. (2024) categorise the required skills into four interrelated domains: pedagogical, relational, political, and organisational. These frameworks provide a comprehensive approach to professional development and offer practical guidance for designing effective programmes.

The Importance of Women Teachers and Their Professional Development

Professional development of teachers, both male and female, is essential not only for preparing students as future agents of societal change but also for strengthening school improvement efforts in various ways, including interpersonal support (Imants & Van der Wal, 2020). In particular, investing in the professional

development of women teachers strengthens inclusivity, nurtures a caring atmosphere in schools and contributes to a more equitable school environment (Saeidi & Khaliliaqdam, 2013; UNESCO, 2001).

A teacher is not only a guardian and guide but also a domain expert. Teachers are expected to stay informed and address students' questions, which requires ongoing development in both content knowledge and relational skills (Creemers et al., 2012). These relational skills are particularly important when dealing with diverse classrooms, where students come from different socio-economic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The teacher's ability to build relationships, communicate effectively and address individual learning needs creates a positive learning environment that benefits all students. Women teachers are naturally considered better than men to embody such qualities (Saeidi & Khaliliaqdam, 2013; Zeynali, 2012). Adding to these innate qualities through targeted professional development enables teachers to refine their relational and instructional skills, which maximises the impact on student learning and overall classroom effectiveness.

In patriarchal societies, women teachers play a crucial role in influencing social change. Their presence as women teachers creates moral pressure on communities and schools to treat girls as equal to boys (UNESCO, 2000). In addition, they help mitigate gender discrimination in families and society by serving as role models who demonstrate the value of educating girls (Sales, 1999). By transforming students into productive individuals, women teachers foster a more change-tolerant society (Rawat, 2014). Thus, investing in the professional development of women teachers is not just an educational priority but also a social one. Empowering women teachers leads to broader societal shifts, particularly in cultures where gender norms limit women's roles and access to opportunities.

Studies in rural India found that women teachers are more trusted by parents for their daughters' education, they perform better in classrooms and create stronger teacher-student relationships (UNESCO, 2001). This trust is rooted in the recognition of women teachers as role models who provide not only academic guidance but also social and emotional support for their students. Similarly, research in Nepal has shown that women teachers positively influence the academic performance of both boys and girls, with girls benefiting particularly (Gurung, 2014; UNICEF & MoEST, 2022). This highlights the far-reaching impact of female educators in reshaping gender roles and promoting equity in education.

Jackie (2006, p. 2) identifies four factors establishing trust between women teachers and student outcomes: Women teachers are trusted by parents, particularly in conservative societies, ensuring girls' access to education; they serve as role models, encouraging girls to complete their education and pursue teaching careers; they advocate for changes in school policies, such as improved facilities for girls, including clean toilets; they act as agents of social change, promoting community development and socialising children in non-traditional ways.

These four factors emphasise the multifaceted role women teachers play not only as educators but also as community leaders and change agents. The trust that parents place in women teachers, particularly in conservative societies, is significant because it reflects a broader societal acceptance of women in positions of influence and authority. This trust is not only limited to educational settings but extends to wider community dynamics, where women teachers are often seen as the ones to challenge outdated gender norms.

Jenkins (2019) emphasises that addressing gender disparities in the teaching workforce is key to improving education outcomes, particularly for girls. Lee et al.

(2019) found that women teachers positively impact girls' test performance, highlighting the importance of gender parity in the workforce. The role of women teachers in improving educational outcomes is not just about academic performance but also about nurturing a sense of agency and self-worth in girls, who are often discouraged from pursuing higher education and career goals due to societal expectations.

Despite the importance of women teachers, gender disparities in teaching remain significant. In low-income countries, only 41% of primary school teachers are women, compared to 82% in high-income countries (UNESCO, 2019). This disparity is also evident in rural versus urban settings, with fewer women teaching in remote areas (UNESCO, 2019). The gender gap in the teaching profession is not only a reflection of broader social inequalities but also a significant barrier to achieving educational equity. It limits access to quality education for girls, who may feel more comfortable learning from women teachers, particularly in regions where gender roles are deeply entrenched.

Davies (1986) offers a three-dimensional framework for understanding the challenges faced by professional women, including teachers: societal sex scripts, organisational structures, and power relations. These factors must be addressed to support women teachers' professional development, as gender inequalities persist in both society and educational institutions (Davies, 1986). These challenges are compounded by the fact that women often face greater scrutiny in their professional roles and are expected to fulfil societal and familial responsibilities alongside their work. This "double burden" can hinder their professional growth and limit their opportunities for advancement.

To enable women teachers to stand up to these and other challenges they face at home and in the workplace, it is crucial to provide them with access to professional development opportunities that address disparities and discrimination, including those discussed above. Such opportunities should be designed in ways that empower women teachers to rise to the unique challenges and barriers they face in patriarchal societies and navigate the barriers (UNESCO, 2006). However, progress over the decades has been insufficient to bridge the gap. In fact, the speed of progress has fallen far short of what is needed. According to the United Nations, at the current rate of progress, it will take “300 years” to achieve gender equality and a discrimination-free society (Pannett, 2023). This observation by the global body overseeing projects and processes aimed at gender inclusion and equality in all walks of socio-political life highlights the urgent need to significantly accelerate the professional development of women teachers to effectively address these disparities.

In 2019, a UNESCO study found that the gender disparities, discrimination and related challenges identified by Davies in 1986 continue to remain unchallenged and unaddressed. This points to the enduring influence of societal and institutional gender biases as well as the lack of role models for children in rural communities. According to Jenkins (2019), this lack of role models in rural areas deprives children, especially girls, of examples that challenge deep-rooted gender stereotypes. Such role models are needed to encourage girls’ enrolment and retention in school. The same issues persist in urban and semi-urban areas, where patriarchal influences continue to affect educational access and outcomes for girls. By producing more women teachers, rural and urban communities can benefit from more inclusive educational environments that challenge these deep-rooted biases.

A few dedicated teachers, especially women teachers, can significantly impact educational systems and practices (Datnow, 2020). Teachers with a “social justice agenda” and “strong support from school leadership” can restructure schools to provide high-quality, rigorous instruction for all students, especially those from underserved, low-income populations (Datnow, 2020, p. 432). Women teachers who are supported in their professional growth and empowered as advocates for change are more likely to succeed in transforming educational environments. Villegas-Reimers (2003, p. 8) echoes this by noting that teachers are key “variables” in educational reform who play both active and passive roles as required to facilitate change.

UNESCO (2000, pp. 55–56) highlights three key components for professional development to empower women teachers as agents of social change, particularly in rural and conservative communities: in-service teacher training with promotion systems that allow wage rises without teachers leaving their communities; more opportunities for women to access management and administrative positions; better training provisions to enhance professionalism and educational quality.

These observations hold particular significance to women teachers of English as well as other subjects in Nepal, where geographical and socio-cultural diversity affects women’s opportunities. Rural and conservative communities, where patriarchal norms are more deeply ingrained than in urban areas, often present additional barriers for women teachers.

By implementing these three components—in-service training with promotion systems, increased opportunities, and improved training provisions—Nepal can not only support the professional development of women teachers but also empower them as catalysts for social change within their communities. Women teachers often serve as the first role models for girls, and their advancement in the profession can create a

ripple effect. This will promote greater gender equality and enhance educational outcomes for all students. As women teachers become more informed and empowered, the change process they contribute to becomes increasingly impactful.

Barriers and Constraints to the PD of Women English Language Teachers

As emphasised earlier, the role of professionally capable women, including women English language teachers, in driving educational and social reform is undisputed. Women's contributions to societal change have been profound, with their leadership in various sectors facilitating critical transformations. However, achieving professional development for women, including women English language teachers, remains a formidable challenge due to entrenched structural, cultural and institutional barriers. These challenges are significantly exacerbated by family and social constraints that are often a result of patriarchal value systems, which continue to shape male-preferred societal norms and practices in many contexts (Bista, 2006; Hunnicutt, 2009; UNESCO, 2000).

In educational settings, these constraints manifest in several ways. Unlike their male counterparts, women English language teachers frequently encounter limitations in terms of access to time, resources and other enabling factors, such as collegiality, which is necessary for professional growth, especially in developing countries (Jayachandran, 2021; Kadel, 2022; Nguyen, 2021). The lack of space for their professional development reflects broader gendered power dynamics, which, as established in sociocultural theory, restrict women's autonomy and agency. These barriers are particularly prominent in regions and communities influenced by rigid caste or class systems, where women professionals, including women English language teachers, are often placed in subordinate roles and expected to prioritise domestic duties over career advancement (Agte & Bernhardt, 2023; Jayachandran,

2015; Tharakan & Tharakan, 1975). For non-native women English language teachers who must dedicate additional time to preparation and staying updated on evolving pedagogical contexts, these constraints become even more challenging to navigate. All this makes it difficult for women English language teachers to participate in decision-making, which naturally prevents them from contributing to quality education and broader educational reform efforts.

Researchers argue that the career development of women, including women English language teachers, is more complex than that of men. It is not because women are inherently less capable, but due to a combination of societal attitudes, role expectations and institutional sanctions (Fitzgerald & Crites, 1980, p. 45). The socialisation processes subtly discourage women from pursuing certain career paths, while reinforcing expectations that align with gendered norms (Lam, 2016). Societal and organisational factors influence the career aspirations and decision-making of women, compounding the barriers they face in accessing professional opportunities (O'Neil et al., 2008). These systemic challenges reflect deeply ingrained cultural norms and institutional structures that restrict professional women's growth and leadership potential, particularly for women English language teachers in non-native contexts like Nepal, where sociocultural norms and institutional biases present unique obstacles (Fitzgerald & Crites, 1980; Hasanah & Utami, 2019; Jayachandran, 2021; Kadel, 2022).

Yousaf and Schmiede (2017) identify three key barriers faced by women professionals globally: (a) personal barriers linked to perceptions of women's leadership capabilities, (b) social barriers stemming from patriarchal mindsets, and (c) organisational barriers, such as concerns about exploitation and harassment, which deter women from aspiring to leadership roles (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017, pp. 8–10).

Kholis (2017) finds these barriers evident in her study of Indochina academia. Her study suggests that in similar settings—including Nepal—systemic challenges constrain the professional advancement of women, including English language teachers, who face comparable socio-cultural and institutional obstacles.

Building on these systemic challenges, personal barriers often stem from deeply ingrained socialisation processes, including early influences on women's perceptions of their roles. From childhood, many girls are socialised into passive familial roles, which shape their professional aspirations and self-concept (Connell, 2009; Nash, 2020). Narratives that glorify male leaders while positioning women as followers further entrench these expectations and limit their ability to envision themselves in leadership positions (Decoteau, 2016; Fitzsimmons et al., 2014). Such implicit biases, internalised during upbringing, significantly restrict women professionals' confidence and aspirations, particularly in pursuing leadership roles, which they are conditioned to perceive as male domains and unsuitable for women. This systemic bias is evident not only in broader professional contexts but also in the specific experiences of women English language teachers, who are shaped by the same childhood habitus and cultural narratives that perpetuate limited aspirations and reinforce traditional gender roles (van Oosten, 2017).

The study by 'Opportunity Now'—a consortium of private and non-governmental organisations in the UK—involving over 1,300 women in mid-to-senior-management roles, including 117 CEOs, identifies family responsibilities, male stereotyping, the absence of female role models and inhospitable organisational cultures as key barriers to women's professional advancement (Opportunity Now, 2000). These findings highlight how systemic factors, rather than individual limitations, restrict the professional development of women professionals, including

women English language teachers, limiting their ability to access resources and opportunities.

Ahl (2007) further emphasises that the unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities disproportionately burdens professional women, including women English language teachers, restricting their ability to balance caregiving with career development. This imbalance, compounded by societal expectations about the careers women should pursue, reinforces traditional gender stereotypes and limits their exploration of leadership roles or positions of influence.

Research on gender disparities in leadership reveals similar patterns. Lyness and Thompson (2000) found that women professionals faced more obstacles in achieving leadership positions than men, despite comparable qualifications and experience. Cannings (1988) reported that women professionals in Canada were 20% less likely than their male counterparts to receive promotions. This disparity is further exacerbated in developing countries, where conservative gender norms significantly constrain the leadership expectations and opportunities of women professionals, including women English language teachers (Jayachandran, 2020). These systemic barriers are not limited to leadership roles. They permeate other aspects of professional development as well, restricting growth and mobility across diverse professional contexts.

Despite these systemic barriers, women teachers of all subjects continue to play a central role in shaping the educational landscape of societies (UNESCO, 2000). Their contributions often excel in fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments and promoting gender equality in classrooms. However, the lack of institutional investment in their professional development undermines their ability to enhance their teaching and leadership skills (Sultana et al., 2014). This reflects a

systemic failure to fully recognise and support their potential, which affects all women teachers, with an additional burden on women English language teachers who require extra time and labour to prepare and deliver lessons effectively. These barriers disproportionately hinder their ability to advance in their careers and assume leadership roles. They perpetuate a cycle of limited or no professional growth.

Teaching remains a high-stress profession, particularly for women English language teachers. Balancing professional demands with domestic responsibilities is not easy. In patriarchal societies like Bangladesh and Pakistan, these dual burdens intensify stress and limit opportunities for professional advancement (Sultana et al., 2014). Similar trends are evident in Tanzania, Peru, and Nepal, where cultural norms and institutional biases stifle women English language teachers' aspirations for leadership roles and professional growth (Jáuregui & Olivos, 2018; Kharel, 2019; Mbepera, 2015). These challenges highlight the interconnectedness of systemic, societal and institutional factors in shaping the professional trajectories of women English language teachers.

Moreover, educational curricula often perpetuate gender stereotypes, limiting career advancement opportunities for women teachers in general. Studies from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Malaysia reveal pervasive biases in textbooks that reinforce traditional gender roles but discourage both women teachers and students from challenging these roles (Islam & Asadullah, 2018). While specific studies on Nepal are lacking, it is plausible that similar patterns and orientations exist, given the cultural parallels. Such biases—or any hint to that end—discourage both female students and teachers from pursuing leadership roles or challenging traditional gender expectations. The reinforcement of patriarchal values and gender discrimination

through textbooks is particularly concerning in traditionally patriarchal societies, where educational materials have the potential to influence social norms significantly.

In response to these systemic challenges, Anderson's (2018) interactive approach to professional development emphasises active teacher participation and context-specific strategies. Lieberman's (1994, as cited in Villegas-Reimers, 2003) concept of a supportive culture further underscores the importance of creating collaborative environments where women English language teachers can share insights, seek guidance and receive support. These approaches recognise the need for systemic reform to empower women English language teachers and enable them to thrive as educators and leaders in their institutions as well as communities. Applying such context-specific strategies in Nepal could address systemic barriers and empower women English language teachers to achieve their professional potential while contributing to more equitable and inclusive educational environments.

Teacher Professional Development in Nepal

The discussion on teacher professional development in Nepal requires a brief review of the history of formal education, as it shapes the teaching profession and teachers' professional development. This history is exclusionary, elite-driven and purposefully designed to serve the interests of the rulers.

Education as Rulers' Privilege

Modern education in Nepal emerged as an exclusive privilege of the ruling elites, not as a right or public good accessible to common citizens (Write, 2007). Junga Bahadur Rana, the founder of the Rana regime, faced significant challenges engaging effectively with the English-speaking world during his visit to Europe in 1850–51. Recognising this limitation, he prioritised educating his children, particularly his sons. Consequently, in 1853, he “brought two teachers from England

and established an elementary English school at his residence” (Sharma, 1990, p. 3). Initially known as Junga Bahadur’s school, and later renamed Durbar School, it marked the inception of modern education in Nepal. However, its purpose was narrowly defined: the school exclusively educated the children of the Rana rulers to ensure they could communicate and build rapport with the British residents. It remained inaccessible to non-Rana children and served no broader educational goals, such as advancing teacher development.

Approximately 55 years after Junga Bahadur’s initiative, Chandra Shumsher, another prominent Rana leader, established ‘Shresta Pathsala’ in 1905. This school, focusing on government laws and procedures, was the first civil institution intended to produce low-ranking civil servants like clerks to support the Ranas’ administrative operations (Sharma, 1990). Subsequently, in 1919, Tri-Chandra College was founded to provide higher education to Durbar School graduates. Initially affiliated with Calcutta University and later with Patna University in India, the college admitted only a few carefully selected students from the ruling class. Its establishment was driven largely by pressure from the British colonial administration in India, which supported the Rana regime and exerted influence to promote higher education. Reflecting this reluctant concession, Chandra Shumsher remarked at the inauguration of the college that its opening—which he “compelled to do because of the time and circumstances” (Sharma, 1990, p. 5)—might potentially mark the beginning of the Rana regime’s decline.

Thus, during the Rana regime, no efforts were made to promote public education. Education remained a tool for consolidating power, with no vision or investment directed toward teacher professional development. It was only after the

overthrow of the Rana regime in 1951 and the subsequent establishment of democracy that Nepal began to witness the gradual emergence of broader educational initiatives.

Institutional History of Teacher Professional Development

The institutional history of teacher professional development in Nepal began with the establishment of the College of Education (CoE) in 1957, two years before Tribhuvan University (TU) was founded. The CoE, which later evolved into the Faculty of Education (FoE), was the first institution explicitly dedicated to teacher professional development. It offered both pre-service and in-service training for teachers. Its establishment was a response to the recommendations of the Nepal National Educational Planning Commission, which emphasised the need to “produce trained manpower to teach at the primary and secondary schools” (TU, n.d.). This aligns with international scholarship that highlights the critical role of teacher training institutions in shaping national education systems (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

The establishment of the CoE marked a pivotal institutional milestone in Nepal’s educational history. In 1971, under the National Education System Plan (NASP), the CoE was renamed the Institute of Education (IoE). Though short-lived, the Plan introduced policies making training compulsory for graduates seeking teaching positions, which accelerated the growth of teacher education (Rijal, 2013). Research on the influence of policy reforms on teacher education, such as the work of Cochran-Smith (2003) and Villegas (2015), underscores the transformative potential of such initiatives in creating structured pathways for teacher professional development. Awasthi (2003, p. 17) further noted that these policies “created a favourable environment for the expansion of teacher education and training institutions,” leading to the establishment of the College of Education, National

Vocational Training Centre, and Primary School Teacher Training Centre under the IoE umbrella.

Following recommendations from the Royal Commission on Higher Education (1980), the IoE transitioned into the Faculty of Education (FoE) to offer pre-service academic programmes. This shift mirrors global trends emphasising the specialisation of institutions to improve the quality of teacher preparation (Schleicher, 2018). The FoE has since offered diverse academic programmes, including a one-year Teacher Preparation Course, a four-year Bachelor of Education (BEd), and advanced programmes, such as the Master's degrees, Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). These programmes address the preparation of teachers and researchers across subjects such as language, science, and health education.

Additionally, 11 other universities, including Kathmandu University and Pokhara University, contribute to the pre-service teacher education ecosystem, reflecting a broader diversification of education providers in Nepal. However, the specific challenges and opportunities for women English language teachers in navigating this system have yet to be critically examined in the context of gendered barriers and inequities.

In 1993, the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) was established to spearhead in-service teacher training as a complement to pre-service education. NCED, now merged into the Centre for Education and Human Resources Development (CEHRD) operated under the Ministry of Education and provided short-term and long-term training for primary and secondary teachers until 2018, when CEHRD took over the function (Atuhurra et al., 2023). The importance of in-service training in addressing the evolving needs of teachers has been emphasised in research, particularly in contexts where pre-service training alone is insufficient to prepare

teachers for complex classroom realities (Avalos, 2011). NCED's role in offering "primary level pre-service teacher training programmes through its affiliated primary teacher training centres" (Gautam, 2016, p.44) underscores the interconnected nature of initial and ongoing professional development. Yet, gender-sensitive training and support for women teachers, especially in rural areas, remain underexplored.

An additional institutional milestone in Nepal's teacher professional development journey was the establishment of the Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID) in 1975. CERID's mandate to "carry out innovations and research to upgrade the quality of education" (CERID, 2013, p.1) situates it as a critical actor in linking research and practice. Literature on research-informed teaching (Cordingley, 2015) highlights the significance of such institutions in bridging the gap between educational theory and classroom implementation. CERID has promoted teacher development through initiatives like peer-learning platforms, research project involvement and sharing research outputs for practical use in teaching activities. These approaches reflect the principles of situated learning proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 29), who argue that "...the mastery of knowledge and skill requires ... full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community" highlighting the collaborative and contextually embedded nature of professional growth. However, CERID's programmes often lack explicit attention to the unique professional development needs of women English language teachers, who may face additional socio-cultural and institutional constraints.

Despite these advancements, the gap between policy provisions and practical implementation remains a challenge. This disconnect, noted in official documents like the Tribhuvan University Act (Timilsina, 2014), reflects broader difficulties in operationalising educational reforms (Fullan, 2007). Women English language

teachers in particular encounter barriers such as limited access to professional development opportunities, which call for targeted interventions.

Since the 1990s, the rise of non-governmental and private institutions has diversified the field of teacher professional development. Among these, the Nepal English Language Teachers Association (NELTA), established in 1992, has emerged as a key player. With over 6,000 members, NELTA organises seminars, conferences, and peer-learning initiatives, creating what Lave and Wenger (1991) term “communities of practice,” in which English language teachers, both men and women, generate motivation for their professional development. However, its dependency on support from international organisations like the British Council and the Regional English Language Office underscores the importance of sustained resource partnerships (Gnawali, 2013). While the contributions of NELTA are significant, the extent to which it addresses the specific professional development needs of women English language teachers requires further examination.

In recent years, the professional development of women teachers has gained policy attention as part of broader equity and inclusion goals. Research has consistently shown that women teachers play a crucial role in increasing girls’ enrolment and retention in schools, thereby making educational institutions more inclusive (Unterhalter, 2015). Policies emphasising women teacher development aim to empower women as equal agents while addressing systemic barriers rooted in patriarchal norms (MoEST, 2022; MoWCSC, 2020). Although some progress has been reported, particularly in increasing female teacher recruitment and girls’ enrolment, sustained efforts are needed to translate these policies into transformative practices (MoF, 2018; MoWCSC, 2020). For women English language teachers, in particular, these policies represent an opportunity to navigate systemic constraints and

strengthen their professional identity, ultimately contributing to the broader goals of equity and quality in education.

Laws, Policies and Programmes Supporting PD of Women

Over the decades, significant advancements have occurred at the legal, policy and programmatic levels in Nepal to promote women's rights and interests in both personal and professional spheres. These advancements have laid the foundation for improved gender equity across various sectors, including education. This section provides a comprehensive review of the major legal and policy developments that form the current framework supporting women's rights, particularly in the field of education, to contextualise this study on the professional development of women English language teachers in Nepal. By examining these developments, it becomes clear how national and international policies have sought to create an environment that supports the empowerment and professional growth of women, especially in the teaching profession.

The Constitution of Nepal, 2015, stands as a cornerstone for the protection and promotion of women's rights, providing for nearly all universally recognised rights for women, such as the right to dignity, gender equality, social security, education and employment. Article 38 specifically addresses gender equality, asserting that women are entitled to equal protection under the law. Furthermore, it includes provisions aimed at eliminating gender-based discrimination, such as those stipulating equal remuneration and social security for equal work, regardless of gender. The inclusion of these rights in the Constitution reflects a commitment to creating a society that values and upholds the dignity and equality of women. This legal foundation is critical when considering how such constitutional guarantees intersect with the

professional development of women English language teachers, as it establishes a broad framework for gender equality in all areas of life, including education.

In addition to the constitutional provisions, the National Women's Commission Act, 2018, established the National Women's Commission, which plays a crucial role in safeguarding and advancing women's rights. The Commission's responsibilities include monitoring the implementation of constitutionally guaranteed rights and proposing measures to overcome obstacles impeding the achievement of gender equality. Through its oversight, the Commission actively ensures that laws and policies promoting gender equality, such as those relevant to women teachers, are effectively enacted. Its recommendations to the government are pivotal in accelerating progress in areas such as education, where gender disparities remain prevalent. By overseeing these processes, the Commission indirectly influences the professional development of women English language teachers by ensuring that gender biases in educational environments are systematically addressed.

The National Education Policy, 2019, further enhances the legal framework by focusing on ensuring equal access to education for girls and women. It introduces provisions for positive discrimination, particularly for women teachers, including those with special needs. These provisions are intended to promote the participation of women in teaching and leadership roles, which directly supports the professional development of female educators. Moreover, the policy emphasises merit-based appointments and the introduction of a professional code of conduct, which sets standards for continuous professional development and the creation of supportive environments for teachers. Gender equality is prioritised in educational leadership roles, which promotes the professional growth of women teachers within the system. The introduction of these elements reflects a broader commitment to improving the

status of women in education, influencing the opportunities available to women English language teachers in Nepal.

The National Policy on Gender Equality, 2021, further strengthens Nepal's commitment to gender justice by emphasising the need for the meaningful participation of women in all sectors, including education. The policy aims to empower women socially, economically and politically by addressing gender-based discrimination and promoting social inclusion. Its focus on institutionalising gender-responsive governance at all levels of government ensures that gender considerations are integrated into decision-making processes across the public sector, including those that affect the educational system. The emphasis on creating an enabling environment for women's participation in the workforce aligns with the goals of improving the professional development of women teachers, particularly those in leadership roles. This policy also underscores the importance of women's active participation in shaping the education system, which is crucial for the advancement of women teachers in all areas, including English language instruction.

In addition to national policies, Nepal's commitment to international agreements further supports gender equality. Nepal has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action. Both advocate for global gender equality and the removal of barriers to women's empowerment. These international instruments provide both a framework and a set of guidelines for tackling gender-based discrimination, aligning Nepal's domestic policies with international standards. Through the domestication of these agreements, Nepal has committed to advancing gender equality within the country, which has direct implications for the professional development of women English language teachers. The alignment with global norms

strengthens the national commitment to creating a gender-inclusive educational environment where women teachers can thrive (MoEST, 2022; MoWCSC, 2020).

Collectively, these policies and legal frameworks provide a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to promoting women's rights, gender equality and social justice in Nepal. They create an environment where the professional development of women English language teachers is not only possible but encouraged. Understanding the impact of these legal and policy developments is crucial for this study, as they provide the context in which women English language teachers navigate their professional journeys. The following sections examine how these legal and policy instruments have shaped the experiences of women English language teachers in Nepal, with particular focus on how they have influenced their professional development opportunities.

Impact of Teacher Professional Development Initiatives

The literature on TPD efforts—both pre-service (university-offered academic courses) and in-service (training offered by MoE)—suggests that these initiatives have not achieved the expected outcomes in terms of improved teaching performance or student achievement (Gautam, 2016). Across all subjects, including English, the impact of these efforts has been minimal. Research consistently shows that despite various training programmes and policy shifts, improvements in classroom teaching and student performance remain inadequate.

This conclusion is echoed in the findings from government assessments. A study conducted by the Department of Education (DoE) in 2006 assessed the impact of primary teacher training and identified several shortcomings. The study highlighted a top-down approach in training design, which offered no opportunity for trainees' involvement. The management and delivery of the training were criticised

for being poorly planned and executed, with no clear plans for follow-up. As a result, teachers were not able to apply the training in the classroom, and the school environment, especially the role of headteachers, did not provide adequate support. Consequently, the transfer of knowledge from training to teaching practice was almost non-existent (DoE, 2006). These findings point to the systemic challenges that continue to affect the professional development process, including for women English language teachers, where a supportive environment is often lacking.

Further assessments conducted in 2015 revealed a similar picture. Subedi (2015) concluded that despite efforts to improve teacher training, the outcomes remained largely unchanged from 2006. While teacher confidence improved through the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, the application of these skills in practice had not shown tangible effects on teaching and learning outcomes. In his assessment of teacher training effectiveness, Subedi (2015, p. 12) outlined several persistent issues that hindered the success of training programmes:

(a) training curricula were overly ambitious, expecting teachers to apply skills that were unrealistic given the resources and time available, (b) teachers lacked an encouraging environment to implement their learning due to insufficient monitoring and follow-up, and (c) training programmes had minimal impact on improving the quality, access, equity and efficiency of education.

In line with these findings, the 2015 assessment by MoE of grade eight students' performance identified several systemic issues. These included significant regional disparities in student achievement, gaps between institutional and community schools, discrepancies between lower and higher cognitive skills and rural-urban differences in performance. The report also noted a decline in

achievement over time and highlighted factors such as the unavailability of textbooks, bullying and teacher reluctance to assign and check homework as major obstacles to student success (MoE, 2015, pp. vi–x). These systemic issues affect the teaching and learning process and illustrate the challenges that women teachers, particularly in rural areas, face in implementing effective teaching practices.

Shah (2015) further identifies numerous obstacles to professional development, including the urban-centric nature of training opportunities that limit access for rural teachers. Other barriers include doubts about the quality of training and the lack of an environment conducive to applying newly acquired skills, particularly when teachers are burdened with heavy workloads that leave little time or motivation for innovation. These challenges contribute to a cycle in which professional development programmes fail to lead to sustainable improvements in teaching practices or student outcomes.

Rijal's (2013) PhD dissertation provides further insight into the barriers faced by women English language teachers in Nepal. His research found that the overwhelming majority of teachers did not have opportunities to discuss or identify their professional development needs with school administrators, who often operated in a top-down manner, providing no space for collaborative reflection and professional growth. Teachers also reported that their progress was rarely reviewed and they received almost no feedback. Opportunities for learning visits, exposure to other institutions and peer interactions were scarce. These gaps hindered the development of a "learning culture" essential for sustained professional growth. Rijal's (2013) findings suggest that the absence of a clear, structured policy framework for teacher professional development has been a key factor in preventing the development of such a culture. DIRD (2018) has also echoed these findings.

A 2023 report by the British Council further reinforces these concerns. The report acknowledges that while many teachers feel that TPD training has led to some positive changes in their teaching, others, including headteachers and educational officers, remain sceptical about the sustainability and impact of these changes (Borg & Vertex, 2023, p. v). Large class sizes and inadequate teacher support systems have been identified as significant barriers to applying newly acquired knowledge. Additionally, the report points to limited resources and the absence of performance-based incentives as contributing factors that undermine the potential for lasting improvement in teaching practices.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST, 2022) has also acknowledged the systemic challenges facing teacher professional development in Nepal. The lack of a continuous, structured professional development system, coupled with the absence of performance-based incentives and a transparent system for teacher accountability, remains a major barrier to progress. These shortcomings suggest that professional development efforts are still not integrated into the education system in a meaningful way and have not delivered the expected outcomes.

However, not all efforts have been without impact. A comprehensive study by Gnawali (2013) highlights the positive contributions of non-governmental initiatives, particularly those led by the Nepal English Language Teachers' Association (NELTA). NELTA has created a "hierarchy-free environment" that allows its members to engage in voluntary initiatives such as mini-research projects, institutional publications and participation in regional and international conferences. These initiatives, supported by training, workshops, and networking opportunities with universities overseas, have enabled many NELTA members to pursue formal

qualifications, including PhDs. These achievements demonstrate the potential for alternative forms of professional development to have a meaningful impact.

Empirical Literature on Professional Development of Women Teachers in Nepal

In 2006, Dr Min Bahadur Bista led a team of educational researchers to survey the status of women teachers in Nepal. The report—*The Status of Women Teachers in Nepal*—unpacked the status covering a wide range of issues, including women teachers' attitudes toward the profession, the working environment, gender environment in schools and barriers to professional growth (Bista, 2006). A key finding related to the discussion noted that the participation of women was limited in “the so-called ‘hard fields,’” such as English (10%), mathematics (4%) and science (3%) (Bista, 2006, p.52). The report indicates that women would not prefer to enrol for these subjects in the first place. A combination of factors, including the supply of pre-service educational opportunities, the gendered expectations of women by home and society, the institutional environment and the condition of work-life balance, were responsible for choosing and pursuing their careers. The women teachers, both English and non-English, identified “heavy teaching load, lack of time to prepare for teaching both at home and at school, negative attitudes of parents, uncooperative colleagues, lack of resources and materials, [lack of] training and experience, lack of administrative support and large class size” as the main barriers to their professional development (Bista, 2006, p.109).

Since the report, Nepal has made significant progress on legal and policy fronts. There has been remarkable achievements in terms of educational infrastructure, governance systems, parity in school enrolment and retention of female students, establishment and expansion of universities to prepare trained teachers and other human resources, equity measures enhancing women teachers' participation in

teaching and also in teacher training and professional development (Bajracharya, 2021; Bhatta & Mehendale, 2021; MoEST, 2022). However, the impact of these policy-level developments has been limited. PhD research by Paudyal (2013) among 21 women teachers in Kavre, Kathmandu and Lalitpur, which aimed to analyse exclusion and inclusion experiences and how the women teachers coped with the problems, found mixed results. While women teachers were present in almost all schools due to the positive discrimination policies of the government, their experience of teaching and school environments remained discouraging. The numerical presence of women teachers, including English teachers, indicated the policy of inclusion being materialised in the composition of teachers. However, the substantive findings that women teachers lacked access to maternity leave, childcare facilities and the culture and space for psychological bonding with colleagues contrast with the larger policy commitments to create an equal, inclusive and women-friendly environment in schools. The fact that resistance and silence were the coping mechanisms adopted by women teachers indicates that they had no other more constructive ways to cope and apply their skills.

Bhusal (2015) found similar results and impressions in her study among five secondary-level women English language teachers in Lalitpur. The teachers were appreciative of the social recognition the profession brought to them, but the teaching environment as a whole was discouraging due to the burden of domestic work, male-dominated management and discrimination in opportunity and benefit sharing. The lack of leadership opportunities in schools also negatively affected their motivation and psychosocial well-being. The aim of the study, which adopted the transcendental phenomenological method, was to explore supporting and hindering factors of women teachers' professional development.

Dahal (2023) also found the persistence of ‘personal,’ ‘professional,’ and ‘working environment’ related challenges facing secondary-level women English language teachers in community schools of Kirtipur. Personal challenges included the pressure of domestic work, a non-cooperative family and parental doubts that women English language teachers could provide a good education. Among professional challenges were heavy workload, unsatisfactory salary, ‘indirect discrimination’ in schools in terms of opportunity sharing and the lack of teaching materials, which demotivated them and obstructed learning. Working environment-related challenges included gender discrimination and unequal treatment in participation in learning-sharing events, negative attitudes toward pregnancy and menstruation and sexual harassment (which was not elaborated on or substantiated). The research, part of Dahal’s Master’s thesis, aimed to explore the professional and personal challenges of women English language teachers and the condition of the workplace environment. It was conducted using in-depth interviews.

For her MPhil research, Gurung-Pradhan (2018, p.8) conducted a narrative inquiry with four female EFL teachers from institutional schools in Kathmandu “to find out about the perceptions of female EFL teachers regarding professional development activities and what motivated them to undertake the journey of professional development.” The findings of the study, especially on the importance of ‘motivation’ for professional development, are interesting. The study found two forms of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. The former came from self-satisfaction, a sense of connectedness with students and other teachers, and the social recognition the profession would bring them. If they had not joined teaching, they would not have experienced these forms of satisfaction. Similarly, extrinsic motivations were rooted in the financial independence that the salary from teaching would ensure and the peer

pressure that they should deliver as optimally as they could. Otherwise, they would face humiliation from peers.

A narrative study by Sapkota (2017) among three female and two male EFL teachers, which aimed to ‘explore’ the teachers’ experience of the ‘process’ and ‘utilisation’ of professional development opportunities in high schools in Kathmandu, revealed a heavy workload, difficulty in time management and training sessions not being relevant to the contexts and needs of the teachers as discouraging factors. The salary from a school was insufficient for some teachers to manage their families, which compelled them to find another job, leaving no time for them to focus on professional development. Gurung’s (2022) Master’s thesis explored the job satisfaction of four lower-secondary level women teachers in Gorkha through a narrative method and found that the women teachers were satisfied with their jobs, as they provided them with recognition and financial support. However, the overall work environment and social attitude were not encouraging, as recorded by most of the studies reviewed above.

I also reviewed literature on the experiences of non-English language women teachers in Nepal to capture culturally specific insights and contextual nuances often absent in English-language scholarship, and to enrich the understanding of local gender dynamics in education. One such study by Sitaula (2023) involved an ethnographic study of five women teachers at private colleges in Kathmandu. Sitaula found instances of sexual advances made by male colleagues and management committee members in exchange for promotions. Protesting against these advances not only denied promotions to these women but also led some to quit their jobs. Similarly, the study by Dahal (2023), discussed above, came across instances of sexual violence experienced by women teachers in public schools. These two studies

indicate that the policies developed over the decades to protect, empower and motivate women are insufficient to provide them with an enabling professional space. They also hint at a more pernicious possibility that our educational institutions are not secure for women. However, to gain a more conclusive understanding of this reality, focused studies from the perspective of women's rights and gender justice are necessary.

The study by Subba (2019) examined the status of women's access to higher education in Nepal by engaging eight female students pursuing a Master's programme in Gender Studies at Tribhuvan University. The study explored the higher education journey of female students, and not necessarily their professional development. However, it unpacked factors that support and hinder women's pursuit of higher education. It revealed issues affecting their educational advancement, the starting point for professional development. The study appreciates the policy-level developments and exposes the gaps that exist in policy implementation. Continued gender discrimination both at home and in educational institutions, poor condition of physical infrastructure in academic institutions and lack of women's access to financial resources were among the major gaps in policy implementation. An anthropological study by Gurung (2019) on women teachers' job satisfaction in public schools of Pokhara also echoed the findings of Subba (2019). While the women teachers were found satisfied with the job as it brought them out of domestic work and earned them some social recognition, the pressure of domestic work, the lack of a 'gender-responsive working environment' and professional development opportunities in schools kept them demotivated.

The latest study by Yashodhara Joshi Pant (2024), involving a detailed case study of three female heads of Community Schools in the Kathmandu Valley, found

the schools inclusive and participatory in decision-making and trustworthy among different constituents, such as School Management Committees, teachers and students. The schools were also rich in social rapport. These attributes have cumulatively contributed to an enabling environment for professional development as well as good learning outcomes among students. The study reinforces the notion that women-led administrations are academically enabling, as they provide space for collaboration, communication and problem-solving, despite usual workplace-related institutional barriers and socio-cultural obstacles.

In reviewing the literature on the professional development of women English language teachers in Nepal, most of the studies are drawn from academic dissertations. What is common in the various works reviewed is that there exists a gap between policy promises and ground reality. The policy provisions have not significantly improved professional development outcomes for women teachers, particularly women English language teachers.

Theoretical Referents

In this subsection, I present a brief review of the theoretical frames—or the lenses—I have used to analyse and interpret the data. These frames and lenses have guided the entire process of my study—from the collection and analysis to the interpretation and discussion of data—and have become central to the meaning-making processes.

Socio-Cultural Theory

Socio-cultural theory, as employed in this study, is informed by the works of Bonny Norton (Darvin & Norton, 2023; Peirce, 1995) rather than the Vygotskian framework. While Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory emphasises the role of social interaction and cultural tools in cognitive development, Norton's interpretation shifts

the focus towards identity, power, and agency in the learning process. This version of socio-cultural theory foregrounds how a learner's identity, personal experiences and the broader social and political environment influence learning opportunities. This theoretical lens is chosen because it moves beyond cognitive development to interrogate the social positioning of learners, especially in contexts marked by unequal power relations. It is, thus, particularly suitable for this study.

Norton's theory introduces the concept of 'investment,' which challenges the traditional cognitive emphasis on 'motivation.' Unlike motivation, typically framed as an internal psychological drive, investment reflects a learner's anticipation of tangible and intangible returns, such as social recognition, identity, economic opportunities or personal empowerment, negotiated within a socio-cultural context (Peirce, 1995). This concept is especially useful for this study because it captures how teachers' aspirations are shaped by broader structural and cultural forces. It is particularly relevant for understanding teacher professional development, as it situates learning at the intersection of personal goals and the socio-cultural conditions that empower or constrain those goals.

The theory is central to this study because it offers a lens through which to analyse the complex interplay of identity, agency and power in the professional development of women English language teachers in Nepal. Unlike approaches that focus solely on individual or institutional factors, Norton's perspective illuminates how deeply entrenched socio-cultural norms—especially in patriarchal societies—shape women's access to growth and recognition. By examining how these teachers perceive their professional identities, the systemic challenges they face and the incentives or disincentives for their investment, this framework helps reveal both the barriers and enablers of meaningful development. It shifts the focus from surface-

level access to opportunities to a more nuanced understanding of how those opportunities are perceived, negotiated and utilised.

In patriarchal contexts, teachers' investment in professional growth is mediated by systemic power dynamics, institutional norms and cultural expectations. Evidence suggests that teacher learning cannot be separated from the wider social, cultural and political environment in which teachers live and work (Fullan, 2007; Mansour et al., 2014; Poppe et al., 2024). This aligns with Becker's (1999) observation that patriarchal systems often marginalise women, silencing their voices and curtailing their participation in professional and social domains.

Norton's lens also calls for an examination of the incentives—or lack thereof—that shape women teachers' investment in professional development. While liberal societies may create space for equitable participation, patriarchal traditions impose vertical hierarchies that restrict women's agency. Foucault (1977) argues that those in power—predominantly males in patriarchal contexts—construct rules and institutions to perpetuate their dominance. This systemic bias affects not only women's access to professional development opportunities but also the value they attach to investing in such opportunities.

In the context of this study, Norton's socio-cultural theory provides a critical framework for exploring how women English language teachers navigate the socio-cultural forces influencing their professional development. It emphasises the importance of understanding how identity, power relations and institutional structures shape their willingness and ability to invest in their growth. This approach moves beyond an individualistic view of learning to consider the collective and systemic factors that enable or hinder professional advancement.

Patriarchy

This study adopts patriarchy as a theoretical lens to analyse how deeply embedded gender norms and systemic inequalities affect the professional development of women English language teachers in Nepal. Patriarchy, which literally means “rule by the father,” is a pervasive global phenomenon that shapes social structures and relationships across societies (Saini, 2023; Walby, 1990). While patriarchal norms are evident in all cultures, they are particularly entrenched and visible in developing or so-called “third world” contexts such as Nepal (Kabeer, 1994).

Patriarchy is not simply the outcome of individual men’s actions but a complex social system that institutionalises male dominance and normalises gender inequality. As Johnson (2005) argues, patriarchy is sustained by a set of practices and beliefs, termed “maleness,” that consistently position men as dominant and women as subordinate across public and private domains. These norms regulate what is considered acceptable for women by restricting their agency, visibility and participation in decision-making processes.

In patriarchal societies, gender roles are rigidly defined. Men are often seen as breadwinners and authority figures, while women are relegated to caregiving and supportive roles. This socially constructed division of labour curtails women’s mobility and professional aspirations (Gupta et al., 2023). Even when women do participate in the workforce, they encounter systemic barriers such as the ‘glass ceiling,’ which limits access to leadership positions and opportunities for advancement (Cotter et al., 2001). Leadership is still predominantly perceived as a male domain, which discourages women from pursuing such roles and undermines their confidence in investing in professional growth (Lumby, 2015).

For women English language teachers in Nepal, these patriarchal norms have tangible consequences for their professional trajectories. As documented by Adhikari (2013) and Bista (2006), entrenched gender expectations create institutional and cultural biases that restrict women's participation in professional development initiatives and exclude them from key decision-making processes. Schools often operate in ways that reinforce these norms, resulting in discouraging environments where women teachers' contributions are undervalued. Societal expectations that prioritise women's domestic roles further constrain their ability to pursue professional ambitions. The lack of institutional support worsens this marginalisation. In effect, patriarchal structures not only limit career progression. They also shape the professional culture in a manner that diminishes recognition and growth for female teachers.

This theoretical lens is especially relevant to the study because it illuminates the structural, cultural and institutional forces that hinder women's advancement in education. Patriarchy impacts not only what opportunities are available to women teachers but also how they perceive their own capability and motivation to use those opportunities. As Babcock and Laschever (2003) and Sandberg (2013) point out, women often hesitate to advocate for themselves or invest in their careers due to internalised discouragement and external barriers within unsupportive environments.

By applying the lens of patriarchy, this study critically examines how gendered power dynamics influence the professional development of women English language teachers in Nepal. It also explores how these women navigate, negotiate and resist the constraints imposed upon them. In doing so, it reveals the forms of agency they employ within a system that seeks to limit their potential. This perspective connects local experiences with global discourses on gender inequality while offering

a context-specific analysis of how patriarchy operates in Nepal's education sector. It also reflects broader patterns of women's marginalisation across societies.

Feminism

Feminism is both a movement and a theoretical framework. In both forms, it is dedicated to challenging systemic gender oppression and achieving equality between men and women (Fiss, 1994). At its core, feminism seeks to dismantle patriarchal structures that marginalise women and to promote equal rights, opportunities and access to resources across all areas of life, including education and the workplace (Hooks, 2000). This theory is used in the present study to understand and interrogate the structural and cultural inequalities that shape the professional development experiences of women English language teachers in Nepal.

Feminism is particularly relevant to this study because it provides a critical lens to analyse how power operates within gendered institutions. Within both professional and societal realms, systemic gender-based violence and inequality are often interlinked. Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) concept of 'intersectionality' deepens this analysis by highlighting how overlapping identities—such as gender, ethnicity, class, religion and cultural norms—create compounded forms of disadvantage. For women English language teachers in Nepal, these intersecting factors often result in exclusion from leadership roles, decision-making processes and professional development opportunities.

Feminist theory challenges the traditional gendered division of labour and critiques societal norms that discourage women from aspiring to leadership. It calls for structural changes that allow women to assert their agency and voice within professional spaces. In male-dominated professions like teaching in Nepal, prevailing stereotypes frequently cast doubt on women's leadership capabilities, undermine their

confidence and discourage investment in their own professional growth (Sandberg, 2013).

By framing this study within feminist theory, attention is drawn to how these gendered dynamics are institutionalised in the education system. Feminism advocates for policies that ensure equal pay, inclusive professional development and equitable access to leadership opportunities. These principles are not only relevant to gender justice but are also essential for building supportive and inclusive educational environments where women teachers can achieve their potential.

Feminist perspectives have informed educational reforms globally. They have triggered initiatives that challenge gender stereotypes, facilitate more inclusive practices and enhance women's participation and leadership in education (Blackmore, 2013).

In the context of Nepal, applying a feminist lens helps reveal how deeply embedded gender norms limit the growth of women teachers, while also pointing to possibilities for resistance and transformation. This study uses feminist theory to explore how women navigate and contest these barriers and how feminist-informed strategies might empower them to overcome constraints, achieve professional advancement and reshape the educational spaces they inhabit.

Capability Approach

The Capability Approach, developed by philosopher and economist Amartya Sen, offers a critical framework for understanding human development by focusing on individuals' freedoms—their capabilities—to live the lives they want (Sen, 1999). Unlike models that focus solely on income, resources or access, this approach focuses on what people are actually able to do and become. Martha Nussbaum (2000) expanded this perspective by articulating central human capabilities necessary for a

life with dignity. In this study, the Capability Approach provides a powerful lens to examine how structural and gendered inequalities affect the professional development of women English language teachers in Nepal.

The relevance of this theory lies in its emphasis on ‘agency’—the capacity of individuals to make and implement independent decisions (Kabeer, 1999). For women teachers, agency is shaped not only by their personal aspirations but also by the enabling or constraining environments in which they live and work. These environments include socio-cultural expectations, institutional policies and gender norms that either facilitate or obstruct their participation in professional development and leadership roles.

This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of both ‘barriers’ and ‘opportunities.’ It helps explore how systemic issues such as patriarchal norms, unequal workloads, economic limitations and institutional biases restrict women’s freedom to develop professionally. For instance, many women teachers face the ‘double burden’ of managing household responsibilities alongside their teaching roles, which significantly limits the time and energy they can invest in further training or leadership.

Rather than merely identifying what resources are available, the Capability Approach asks what individuals are actually able to achieve with those resources. In the case of Nepali women teachers, this means examining whether they can attend professional development programmes, take on leadership roles and influence decision-making. Often, the answer is shaped by less visible barriers, including discriminatory attitudes, lack of institutional support or internalised gender norms.

By using the Capability Approach, this study highlights the importance of creating an enabling environment that expands women’s real freedoms. It recognises

that addressing visible barriers—like unequal pay or lack of training—is not enough if deeper structural issues remain unchallenged. The theory also provides a framework to identify effective interventions—such as policies that support work-life balance, promote mentorship and leadership training and address institutional discrimination—which can meaningfully expand women’s capabilities.

Importantly, the Capability Approach aligns with intersectional feminist thinking by recognising how factors such as gender, caste, ethnicity and socio-economic status combine to produce layered disadvantages. It also facilitates a deeper understanding of how the affected community—women English language teachers, in this case—navigate these constraints with creativity and resilience, and how supportive systems can enhance their ability to flourish professionally.

In this study, this Approach is used to assess what professional development opportunities exist and how accessible, usable and empowering they are for women teachers. By doing so, the Capability Approach offers a pathway for educational reform grounded in justice, equity and the realisation of human potential.

Implications of the Literature Review for the Study

The literature review has played a pivotal role in shaping the foundation of my study by shedding light on existing knowledge, identifying gaps and highlighting critical areas that require further exploration. Below, I outline how this review has influenced my study.

The review has provided a comprehensive understanding of the state of professional development for women English language teachers in Nepal. It is contextualised within broader global and local experiences of professional women. It has highlighted recurring challenges, opportunities and themes, such as sociocultural barriers, gender inequality and the impacts of professional development programmes.

Through synthesising these insights, I have identified areas where current knowledge is insufficient. This understanding has been reflected in my research questions and the scope of my study.

The review has also reinforced the need for a theoretical lens of intersectionality to understand the complexities surrounding the professional development of women English language teachers. It has guided the selection of appropriate theoretical frameworks, which enable me to undertake a more nuanced analysis of the barriers and opportunities faced by these teachers.

In summary, the implications of the literature review extend beyond background knowledge. The review has directly influenced the focus of my study, its methodological design and the theoretical approach I have adopted.

Synthesis of Existing Knowledge

TPD is widely recognised as a lifelong and context-sensitive process, encompassing both formal learning opportunities—such as pre-service and in-service training—and informal practices including peer collaboration, mentoring and reflective engagement. Its effectiveness is seen to depend on how well it aligns with the cultural, social and organisational contexts within which teachers operate. Literature emphasises that pedagogical, relational, organisational and political dimensions must be integrated into TPD programmes, with strategies such as reflective practice and the integration of technology being identified as critical components.

Gendered dimensions of TPD have received growing attention, particularly in contexts like Nepal, where entrenched patriarchal norms continue to shape women's access to professional opportunities. Socialisation processes that prioritise domestic responsibilities for women often undermine their professional aspirations. Such norms

create a structural habitus that reproduces male privilege and constrains women's sense of agency. Despite these barriers, women teachers are increasingly acknowledged as pivotal change agents in education. They are seen to serve as role models for girls and foster more inclusive learning environments. However, systemic barriers persist, including restricted access to leadership roles, unequal workloads and institutional cultures that reinforce traditional gender hierarchies.

In the Nepalese context, TPD has historically been marginalised, particularly in the public education sector. Reforms initiated after 1951 led to the gradual institutionalisation of TPD through the establishment of teacher education institutions and networks such as the College of Education, the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) and the Nepal English Language Teachers' Association (NELTA). National policies and legal frameworks now increasingly promote gender equity and teacher professional development. Yet, these frameworks often fail to translate into effective implementation. The failure has had limited impacts on the professional growth of women teachers.

Empirical studies in Nepal report a number of persistent challenges faced by women English language teachers. These include excessive teaching loads, limited administrative support and significant rural-urban disparities in access to professional development opportunities. While non-governmental initiatives, particularly those led by NELTA, have made contributions by fostering professional communities and encouraging self-directed learning, their gender responsiveness and reach remain limited.

Theoretical perspectives have further enriched the understanding of TPD in this context. Sociocultural theory foregrounds the role of identity, power and investment. It shows how women's participation in professional development is

deeply influenced by the sociocultural contexts in which they are embedded. The capability approach highlights how structural constraints limit women's real freedoms to pursue professional growth. Feminist theory and patriarchy theory offer critical lenses for analysing how systemic gender norms and institutional structures perpetuate inequality and restrict women's progression in educational leadership.

Together, these strands of literature construct a multifaceted picture of the professional development landscape for women English language teachers in Nepal. They point to both the potential and the constraints within current systems and offer a foundation for further inquiry and targeted interventions.

Identified Gaps in the Literature

While the existing literature provides important insights into the professional development of women teachers in Nepal, several critical gaps persist. These gaps underscore the need for more nuanced, context-sensitive and equity-oriented research to inform policy and practice.

Underrepresentation of Women English Language Teachers' Experience.

While female teachers are widely studied, the specific experiences of women English language teachers—particularly in non-native and resource-limited contexts—remain largely overlooked. This gap is critical because these teachers face distinct professional development challenges related to language skills, curriculum requirements and global teaching standards. Addressing this gap requires targeted and relevant TPD initiatives that align with the lived realities of women English language teachers.

Limited Engagement with Intersectionality. The literature rarely explores how gender intersects with other identity elements—such as caste, ethnicity, religion and socio-economic status—to shape access to and participation in TPD. In Nepal's

stratified social structure, failing to account for these layered inequities obscures the full picture of the barriers women teachers face. An intersectional lens is essential for developing inclusive and equitable professional development policies.

Disconnection Between Policy and Practice. Although national policies promote gender equity and professional growth, their implementation remains weak. There is a lack of systematic analysis of why well-intentioned policies often do not result in tangible support or structural change for women teachers. Bridging this gap requires examining institutional cultures, accountability mechanisms and policy implementation in schools.

Limited Attention to Agency and Resilience. The dominant focus on structural barriers in the literature often sidelines women teachers' acts of resistance, negotiation and adaptation. Research that explores how women assert agency and build resilience in the face of patriarchal norms can shift the narrative from victimhood to empowerment. This, in turn, can inform the design of TPD models that are not only gender-sensitive but also transformative.

Overlooked Issues of Safety and Gender-Based Violence. Preliminary findings suggest that sexual harassment and unsafe work environments significantly hinder women teachers' professional development. Yet, these issues are rarely studied through a gender justice lens. Given their profound impact on psychological well-being, retention and professional engagement, this gap demands urgent attention.

Understudied Dynamics of Motivation. While motivation is recognised as central to teacher professional development, few studies have examined how gendered social roles and expectations influence women teachers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation—particularly in patriarchal contexts like Nepal. Understanding what drives or inhibits women's sustained engagement with TPD is critical for

designing programmes that not only attract participation but also foster long-term professional commitment and growth.

As outlined in the Statement of the Problem in Chapter One, this study explored several underexamined issues by conducting in-depth interviews with women English language teachers in community schools in the Kathmandu Valley. These interviews examined their personal experiences with societal attitudes, collegiality, institutional environment, the impact of childhood habitus and the strategies they developed to navigate available opportunities and deal with various challenges. By drawing on their lived experiences in relation to these specific issues, the study offers valuable insights into the challenges women teachers face and proposes how these barriers might be addressed institutionally and sustainably to enhance their professional development.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework of this study, illustrated in Figure 1, serves as a comprehensive model that integrates several critical dimensions of the professional development of women English language teachers. These dimensions encompass knowledge and experience of professional development, resources and opportunities, barriers and challenges, coping mechanisms and resistance, as well as policies and operational strategies for the future. Each dimension is essential in understanding the multifaceted nature of professional development and how it influences the experiences and empowerment of women teachers. The framework links these dimensions to the theoretical lenses that guide the study, namely socio-cultural theory, the capability approach, feminism and patriarchy. These theories are woven together to provide a holistic view of the factors that influence professional growth and the strategies needed to overcome the challenges faced by women English language

teachers. The integration of these dimensions with the theoretical frameworks allows for a clear understanding of how gender dynamics, socio-cultural contexts and institutional structures impact the professional development and empowerment of female teachers, the central focus of this research.

In addition, Figure 2 presents a methodological and operational diagram that outlines the sources of data for the study, including the research participants, the data collection methods and tools and the process of data analysis and interpretation. This diagram not only details the methodological approach but also shows how the key dimensions and theoretical frameworks discussed in Figure 1 are operationalised in the research design. By visualising the research process, Figure 2 highlights the interconnectedness between the theoretical frameworks and the practical aspects of data collection and analysis. It, thus, demonstrates how these elements work together to address the research questions and objectives.

The conceptual framework, therefore, not only guides the theoretical foundation of the study but also directly informs the research methodology. By linking theory with practice, it ensures that the research process remains focused on the empowerment and professional development of women English language teachers. It does so by addressing the critical dimensions of their professional lives while also acknowledging the societal and institutional challenges they face. This dual approach allows for a deeper investigation into how these teachers navigate barriers, use opportunities and resist systemic obstacles in their pursuit of professional growth. The methodology, as presented in Figure 2, thus serves as the practical extension of the conceptual framework, ensuring that the study's objectives are both theoretically grounded and methodologically sound.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed both global and Nepal-specific literature on teacher professional development, identifying key themes, theoretical contributions, and existing gaps—particularly concerning women English language teachers. The review is divided into nine sections, each contributing to a layered understanding of the topic.

The first section explores the evolving definitions and perspectives on professional development, revealing a shift from narrow skill-based models to broader frameworks that consider emotional, relational, and institutional dimensions. The second section examines key themes and processes, underscoring the significance of informal learning, collegiality, and the influence of gendered experiences on professional growth.

The third section highlights the transformative role of women teachers in patriarchal societies, positioning their development as essential to advancing gender equality. The fourth outlines structural and socio-cultural barriers—including domestic responsibilities and institutional exclusion—that limit women's access to professional opportunities.

The fifth section situates professional development within Nepal's broader educational history, acknowledging policy advancements but noting persistent implementation gaps. The sixth draws from empirical studies on women English teachers, revealing how factors like ethnicity, class, and institutional culture shape their professional trajectories.

The seventh introduces the theoretical frameworks—socio-cultural theory, feminism, patriarchy, and the capability approach—that inform the study's analytical lens. The eighth discusses the implications of the reviewed literature for this study, while the ninth presents the conceptual framework. The final section synthesises the

key knowledge gaps, especially the disconnect between gender-inclusive policies and actual outcomes, establishing the foundation for this research.

In sum, the chapter demonstrates that despite increased policy attention and global awareness, women English language teachers in Nepal continue to face deep-rooted systemic challenges. The literature affirms the need for an intersectional and context-sensitive approach—one that this study adopts—to better understand and support their professional development.

Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework of the Study*

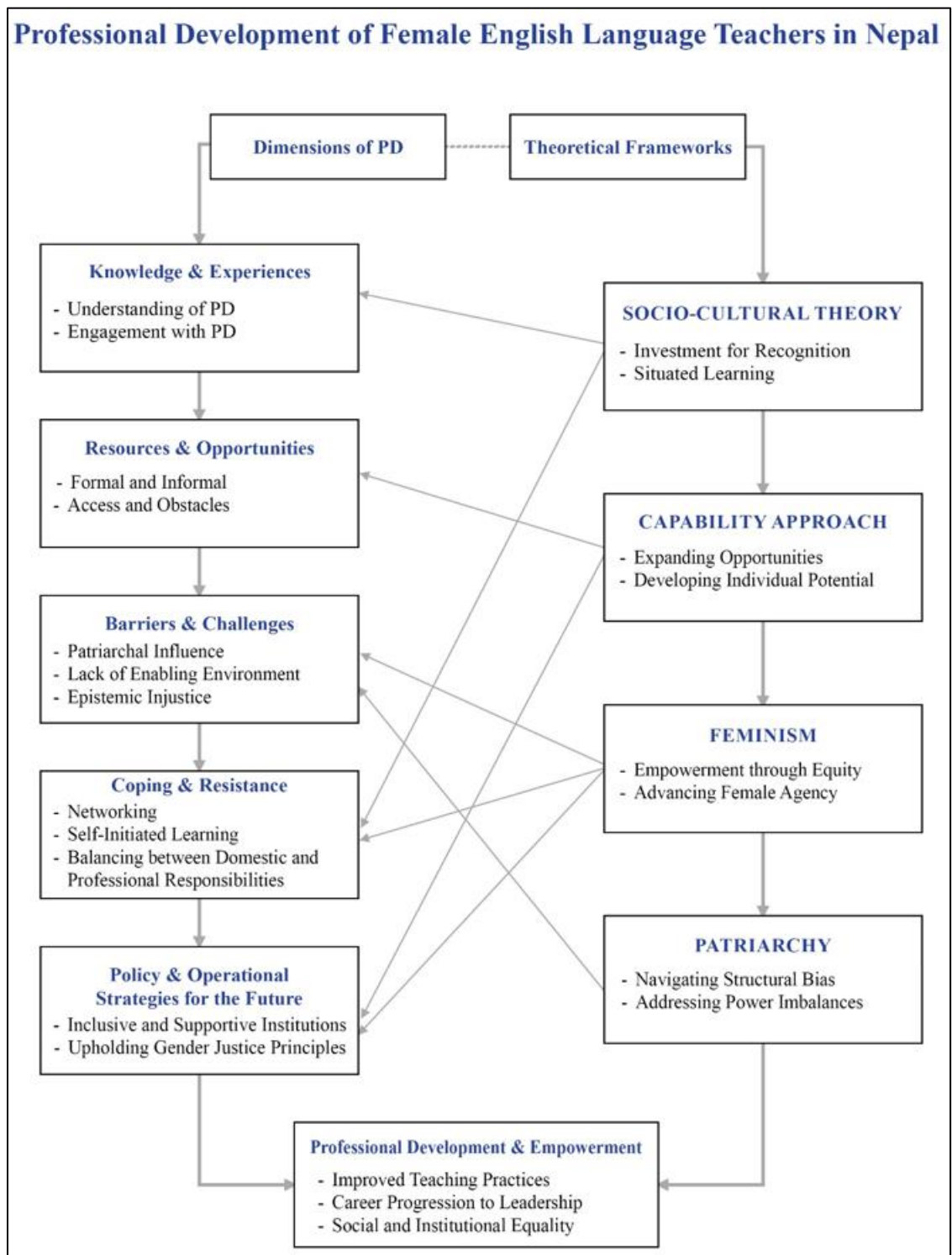
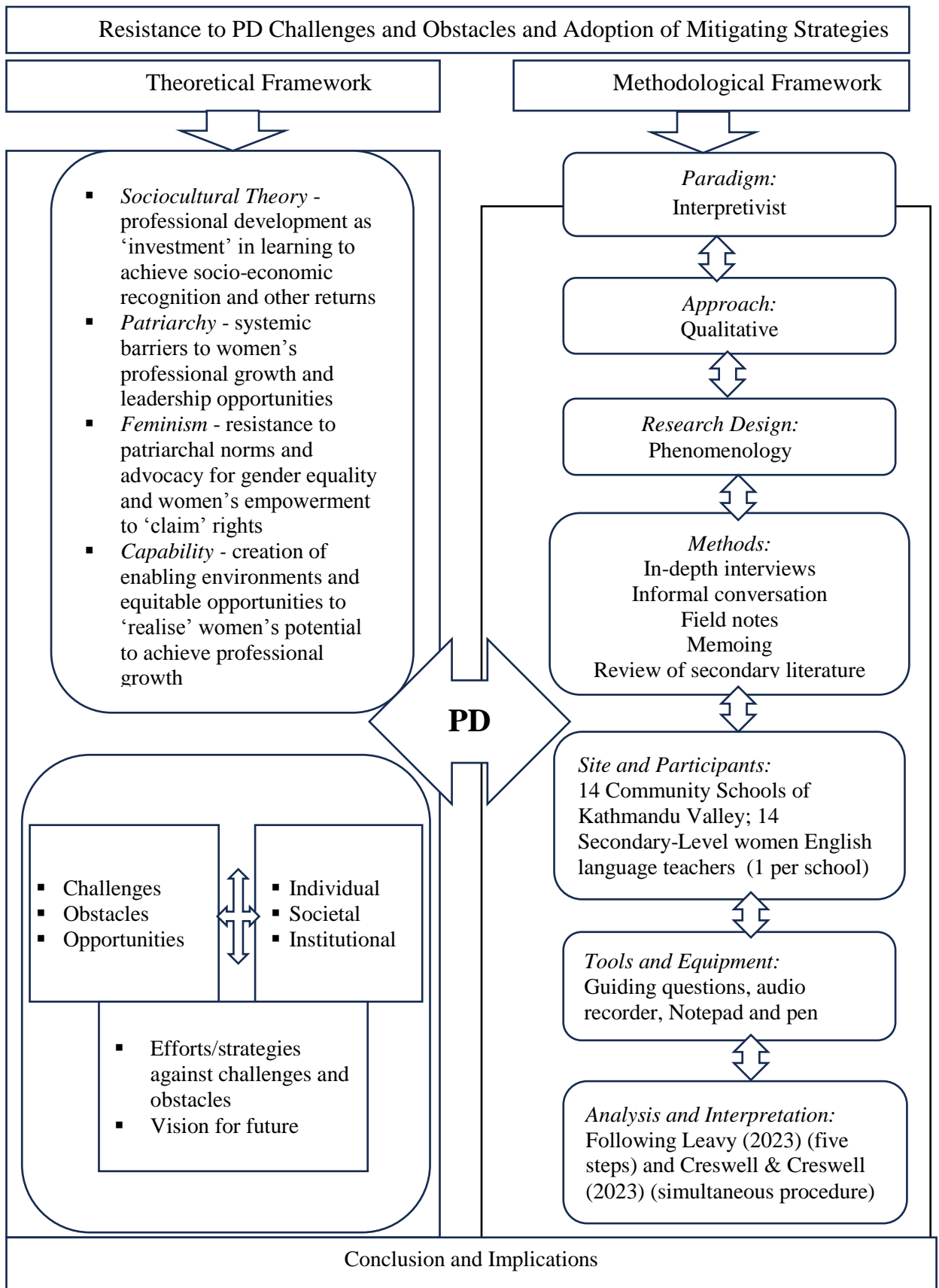


Figure 2. *Methodological and Operational Framework of the Study*



Chapter Three

Research Methodology

In this chapter, I outline the theoretical frameworks in brief, the methodological foundation and the procedures for data analysis and interpretation that guide this study. The presentation begins with a detailed discussion of the theoretical frameworks that form the basis for understanding the professional development of women English language teachers in Nepal. This is followed by an exploration of the paradigmatic and epistemological considerations that underpin the research approach, setting the stage for the study's methodological orientation. The chapter then explains the research design, including the rationale for the chosen methods, data collection tools, and the participant selection process. I also describe the steps taken in data analysis, focusing on how the collected data were examined and interpreted. Finally, I address the ethical considerations adhered to throughout the research process to ensure the integrity and trustworthiness of the study.

While the theoretical frameworks have been reviewed in detail in the previous chapter, this discussion begins with a brief recap to establish the analytical lens guiding the interpretation of data.

Analytical Framework

This study adopts an intersectional framework. It integrates four complementary theoretical perspectives—socio-cultural theory, patriarchy, feminism and the capability approach—to examine the professional development of women English language teachers in Nepal. Intersectionality here refers to how multiple systems of power and identity overlap to influence individual experiences and opportunities. Socio-cultural theory highlights the role of social interaction and cultural context in shaping learning and identity through investment and recognition.

Patriarchy draws attention to the structural power imbalances women teachers face, while feminism emphasises empowerment and agency in challenging these constraints. The capability approach complements these by focusing on expanding opportunities and enabling individual potential. Together, these frameworks provide a sound understanding of the complex interactions among opportunities, challenges, coping strategies and potential remedies in relation to women English language teachers' professional growth in a patriarchal society. This integrated lens informs both the analytical orientation and the interpretation of findings throughout the study.

Research Paradigm and Approach

A research paradigm is a researcher's belief about the nature of reality (ontology). It also includes how knowledge is constructed (epistemology) and the methods through which knowledge can be obtained (methodology). According to Guba and Lincoln (2005), a paradigm is "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (p. 183) and provides the philosophical lens for conceptualising and conducting a study. The research paradigm guides the entire research process from the formulation of research questions and aims to the choice of methodology, tools for data collection and strategies for data interpretation (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Thus, a clearly articulated paradigm ensures philosophical coherence across the study and strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings.

In the fields of educational and social research, various paradigms are discussed and engaged (Yin, 2016). Among them, constructivism assumes that knowledge is socially constructed through the interplay of culture and human interactions. Interpretivism, which is closely related to constructivism, offers a framework for understanding how individuals draw meaning from their experiences. Whereas constructivism highlights knowledge, interpretivism focuses on subjective

interpretation within particular cultural, historical and institutional settings (Cohen et al., 2018; Schwandt, 2000).

This study adopts an interpretivist paradigm. It enables the researcher to collect the lived experiences of research participants and also provides a philosophical foundation for hermeneutic phenomenology, which I have chosen as the method. Interpretivism holds that reality is not fixed or universal, but is multiple and context-dependent. It also posits that meaning is constructed through individual and collective experiences through a process of interpretive engagement with participants (Schwandt, 2000). This paradigm is particularly well-suited to my research, as it enables me to understand the lived professional development experiences of women English teachers in Nepal in the context of deeply rooted socio-cultural expectations and institutional structures influenced by them.

Hermeneutic phenomenology, which is closely tied to interpretivism and the method adopted for this study, extends this orientation by emphasising the interpretive act of understanding experience. Unlike descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology, which suggests bracketing out researcher bias, hermeneutic phenomenology encourages the researcher's subjectivity as a resource for interpretation. It, thus, facilitates a dialogical process in which meaning is co-constructed between the researcher and participants on the basis of lived experience and reflexive interpretation (Laverly, 2003; van Manen, 2016). The researcher's positionality, background and pre-understandings are not seen as constraints. They are, rather, seen as a resource to ground the interpretive process in reality, which I intend to apply in this study.

The hermeneutic phenomenology has been used to explore how women English language teachers in Nepal navigate their professional development journeys

amid socio-cultural constraints and enablers. The goal is not to test pre-formulated hypotheses but to generate situated understandings of the facets of professional development through participants' voices, experiences and interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Through this interpretivist lens, the study contributes not only to academic knowledge but also to a more context-sensitive understanding of professional development in complex social settings like Nepal's.

The qualitative method offers several advantages. It captures the individual experiences and perspectives of women English language teachers and enriches their meanings. It also aligns with other features, particularly those discussed by Yin (2016), which include exploring real-world meanings through participant-centric perspectives in a given contextual setting. To paraphrase Yin (2016) in the context of the study, the method enables me to explore how women English language teachers perceive and experience professional development within the socio-cultural and institutional context of their work.

As discussed above, the study draws on multiple theoretical frameworks that offer an insightful lens for the analysis of the data. The frameworks also enable the exploration of how socio-cultural dynamics, gendered experiences and institutional barriers influence the professional development of women English language teachers.

By adopting a qualitative approach under the interpretivist paradigm, the study is designed to reveal the multiple and subjective truths of participants. It seeks to explore the interconnectedness of their experiences within broader societal frameworks so that the nuances of teacher professional development are comprehensively understood.

Research Design

As discussed above, the study employs a phenomenological research design. It is selected for its capacity to explore the meanings and essences as lived and experienced by participants. This approach is grounded in the ontological assumption that reality—or knowledge—is perceived and constructed through experience-based consciousness (Groenewald, 2004). According to Creswell (2013), phenomenology enables researchers to uncover the shared meanings of individuals in relation to a specific phenomenon. In the context of this study, it facilitates an in-depth understanding of how women English language teachers in Nepal experience and navigate professional development opportunities, challenges and constraints.

The strength of phenomenology lies in its ability to prioritise participants' lived experiences while recognising the influence of their context. Professional development is inherently influenced by factors such as institutional policies, familial expectations and socio-cultural norms. Phenomenology provides a way to examine not only 'what' women teachers experience but also 'how' these experiences are shaped by their unique contexts (Moustakas, 2010; van Manen, 2016).

Given my positionality as a woman English language teacher in Nepal, I bring personal insights into the sociocultural dynamics that influence professional development. These insights enrich the research. But as a researcher, I must be cautious that my reflexivity does not influence participants' voices or the interpretation of data. Aware of the limitations of my positionality, I have ensured that the focus remains firmly on participants' lived experiences rather than my personal preconceptions (Eroglu & Donmus Kaya, 2021).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Phenomenology encompasses two primary branches: transcendental and hermeneutic. This study adopts a hermeneutic phenomenological approach because it aligns with the interpretive nature of the research questions. Unlike transcendental phenomenology, which focuses on description rather than interpretation, hermeneutic phenomenology emphasises interpretation and contextual understanding of a phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2013; Neubauer et al., 2019). Grounded in the philosophical works of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur (Keane & Lawn, 2016), this approach acknowledges that understanding is inherently interpretive and shaped by the researcher's positionality and pre-existing knowledge.

Hermeneutic phenomenology extends beyond mere description to explore the deeper meanings embedded within participants' lived experiences. It recognises that the researcher and participants co-construct meaning through dialogue, reflection and iterative analysis. This co-construction is essential for uncovering the interplay between individual experiences and their broader socio-cultural and institutional contexts. For example, challenges faced by women English language teachers in Nepal may stem from patriarchal norms, while their professional growth may reflect their resilience, agency and the support systems they navigate within these constraints.

This interpretive approach is particularly relevant for studying professional development, as it allows the researcher to delve into the emotional, social and institutional dimensions that shape participants' experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenology provides a lens to examine how these factors influence professional development and how participants make sense of their journeys within complex socio-cultural landscapes (Finlay, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

By adopting hermeneutic phenomenology, this study captures the richness and complexity of participants' narratives while situating these narratives within a theoretical framework that emphasises interpretation, context and shared meaning. This approach ensures that findings are deeply reflective of participants' realities and analytically rigorous so that they can contribute to the broader discourse on teacher professional development in Nepal. Furthermore, hermeneutic phenomenology underscores the importance of reflexivity, where the researcher's engagement with the data is informed by a conscious awareness of their own positionality and its potential influence on the interpretive process (Eroglu & Donmus Kaya, 2021; van Manen, 2016).

In sum, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach not only provides a robust methodological framework but also aligns seamlessly with the study's aim to explore the context-dependent experiences of women English language teachers. This approach highlights the co-constructed and interpretive nature of meaning-making. It offers valuable insights into the intricate interplay of individual agency, socio-cultural dynamics and institutional influences on professional development.

Participants and Study Site

The study involved 14 secondary-level women English language teachers from the Kathmandu Valley, selected based on professional expertise: at least a Master's degree and five years of teaching experience. While these criteria ensured participants possessed sufficient professional experience, the focus was on practical teaching experience rather than academic qualifications.

For phenomenological research, a small sample size of 5 to 15 participants is often deemed ideal, as it allows for in-depth exploration and case-by-case detailed analysis of individual experiences (Creswell, 2013; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The

study used convenience sampling, selecting participants based on availability and willingness to provide relevant data. While this limits generalisability, the diversity of socio-cultural backgrounds and professional roles offers valuable insights into the professional development challenges and opportunities for women English language teachers. Despite the sampling limitations, the study provides a rich, context-specific perspective aligning with qualitative research principles.

Profile of Respondents

Kripa holds an MEd from Tribhuvan University and an MPhil from Kathmandu University. She began teaching at the age of 17 and has 15 years of teaching experience, including eight years in a private school.

She was born into a middle-class family in a village in Khotang and had very supportive and encouraging parents, especially her mother, who was just a literate housewife but very active, bold and conscious about girls' education. Her father was a local-level political leader in the village. Kripa grew up as a bold child and was good at studying as well, compared to other girls in the village. She did not experience any gender-based discrimination regarding education at home.

However, in her school, she noticed the influence of patriarchy. Boys used to humiliate girls. But, no one would stop the boys. When girls, like her, would score well in the examinations, boys used to think that the teachers were sympathetic to the girls in giving marks. She thinks the boys would behave that way because of their attitude that girls are weak and humiliating them is normal.

She was assigned the job of a superintendent in the SLC examination when she was comparatively young and less experienced than other teachers. But, she handled the role very well, though she had to face some threats just because she was a woman. She got married after completing her MEd, moved to Kathmandu and

completed MPhil while teaching. She joined a government school as a secondary teacher in Lalitpur after passing a Teacher Service Commission exam. She has participated in different teacher professional development programmes provided by both private and government institutions in Nepal. A mother of a girl-child, she gets support and motivation from her husband, a university teacher of English.

Sama has a PhD in Education Planning and Management (EPM) from Kathmandu University. Born to a middle-class farming family in a remote village in Sindhuli, she has 18 years of teaching experience.

Her father was very strict against educating daughters. But her mother, despite being illiterate, stood firm in educating her daughter against all difficulties and would send her to school. Sama studied up to class seven in Sindhuli and went to her maternal home in Jhapa for onward studies. After completing her SLC in Jhapa, she continued her higher education along with some side jobs so that she could support herself financially.

After completing a B.A., she returned to Sindhuli to start teaching as a secondary-level English teacher. After she started teaching, she realised the need for pedagogical skills and did a one-year BEd, and later MEd as well. She got married after completing her bachelor's degree to a man very supportive and encouraging of her educational journey. This enabled her to complete PhD amidst opportunities and challenges side by side. She has two grown-up loving and caring daughters in her family.

Dr Sama now teaches in a secondary school in Kathmandu. During her teaching career, she has fulfilled several leading roles in the educational sector, including as a teacher trainer and a resource person.

Mina holds an MA in English and a one-year BEd from Tribhuvan University. Born to a middle-class Brahmin family in Jhapa, she brings with her 17 years of teaching experience as a secondary-level English teacher in public schools.

She started teaching after completing an MA. In the beginning, she thought having a Master's degree was enough for teaching. However, after she started teaching, she realised that she did not have enough practical pedagogical skills that a teacher should have to effectively deal with students in the classroom. Then, she did a one-year BED which has helped a lot in teaching.

She did not face any obstacle to getting a school education in the family although she had to help her mother with household work, especially cooking and cleaning, which her brothers did not have to do. She got married to a government officer and started living with him away from the family, which she says was a positive thing from a professional development point of view. In the joint family, she rarely got time to think about her profession despite her in-laws being comparatively positive and helpful. Her husband is very supportive. He shares household work in need and encourages her in every step.

Currently, she is teaching as a secondary-level English teacher in Lalitpur and is a mother of two grown-up children.

Sani, a native of Duwakot, Bhaktapur, has an MEd from Tribhuvan University and is pursuing an MPhil from Pokhara University. Currently, a secondary-level English teacher in a public school in Bhaktapur, she brings with her 10 years of teaching experience in a public school as a permanent teacher.

Her father was a primary teacher with a positive attitude towards educating both sons and daughters and her mother was a housewife. She did not experience discrimination when she grew up. After marriage, however, she faced several

challenges and obstacles on her way to professional development like any other married woman. Among the challenges were the traditional expectations of the family as well as the motherhood responsibility. However, she believes with continuous efforts and confidence, these challenges can be easily tackled.

In addition to teaching, Sani has experience as the Head of the Department, a leadership position. She is confident in her capacity that she can handle any role in the school but does not get positive support from staff, especially from male staff. She is a mother of a grown-up child.

Anita holds an MPhil in English education from Tribhuvan University and has 17 years of teaching experience. Born to illiterate parents from a working-class family in a village in Makawanpur, she struggled her way into MEd while working as a teacher in a remote village after completing a BEd.

Her parents were not literate but very conscious about their children's education and worked very hard to educate them. It was very difficult for her parents to educate five children with the income they earned. Her father used to work as a driver and her mother operated a snack stall (*khaja ghar*) as a means of income. Anita herself went through a very hard time completing her basic education and + 2. Anita's eldest sister had to give up her studies to help her mother and ensure Anita went to school regularly.

Anita started teaching in a remote village while studying BEd third year and completed her Master's without attending classes. At the beginning of her job, she had to walk for three hours from her home to reach school and another three hours to get back home on foot. However, she never thought of leaving her educational journey. She is happy that she could bring some changes in the village making sure

that all the students she taught pass English in the SLC, which used to be a main concern in the village.

Now she teaches in a public school in Kathmandu as a permanent secondary-level English teacher, which she did together with the MPhil. It was tougher than her teaching experience in the village as she was pregnant at that time. However, her strong desire to have an academic degree and for her professional growth enabled her to overcome the difficulty. A member of an ethnic community, which according to her is, however, more egalitarian than the Khas-Arya and Newar communities, she did not experience discrimination in the family in her childhood.

She lives with her husband, a government employee, who stands by her in her professional development pursuit, and two twins.

Binu has an MEd in English from Tribhuvan University. She has five years of teaching experience, including a two-year experience as a temporary teacher, as a secondary-level English teacher. She was born in Chitwan to a large middle-class Brahmin family. Both of her parents are just literate but conscious of educating children.

Her mother has been a trigger and encouragement for her and her siblings' studies. All eight siblings of Binu have at least completed a BA. One of her sisters is also a teacher, who influenced Binu to be a teacher. However, without her mother's motivation, she would not have perhaps studied and been the teacher she is now. She is married to a government official, who supports her professional engagement and encourages her to be a leader in the field. They live in Kathmandu.

Binu is actively affiliated with some professional organisations related to teaching and learning, including NELTA. The association with such organisations has

been helpful to her in learning from different experiences and also in exchanging ideas with teachers from different areas.

Sharala has an MEd from Tribhuvan University. She has a two-year secondary-level and a three-year lower-secondary-level English teaching experience. Born in a village in Gulmi to a teacher-father and a housewife mother, she had the inspiration and motivation from her father to study and be a teacher right from her childhood.

However, after she passed the Teacher Service Commission for a lower-secondary level position and was posted to a remote village, she was confused about whether to join the service or not. By that time, she was married and had a small baby. Her husband was also a teacher in the next village and they had a small child as well. To join the service would also require her to leave home and the baby. She also thought it would be difficult to stay alone in the village. But her parents, especially her father, stood by her and encouraged her to join the service giving assurance that they would take care of the baby. On the father's insistence, she hesitatingly decided to join the school.

Staying away from the small baby was a bit stressful for her. However, it benefitted her as well. Staying alone, she got enough time to prepare for the Teacher Service Commission's call for a secondary-level teacher's position and got through. She then moved to Kathmandu, together with her husband.

Sharala stays in Kathmandu with her husband and two children. Her husband is quite busy. She has to do every household work alone. Even when he is free, he is not conscious about sharing her household load, such as housekeeping and child caring. She never asks for help as well fearing that it may bring a conflict in their

family. Still, she is happy that she decided to be a teacher. She thinks the challenges and obstacles are a part of life and should be seen as such.

Pramila has an MED and MPhil in education from Tribhuvan University. She also has an MA in sociology from Tribhuvan University. She has 23 years of teaching experience, including five years in a private school.

Born in a village in Gorkha to a farming Brahmin family, she was inspired to study and be a teacher by her parents and her eldest sister. Although just literate, they were fully committed to educating their children and siblings. The entire village environment has a good educational environment, which Pramila claims to have positively influenced her family environment as well.

She did not experience any visible gender-based discrimination in the family as well as her village. After marriage, too, she has not experienced any discrimination. Her in-laws and husband are positive and supportive of her. Her husband is a teacher. He is very helpful and wants Pramila to succeed in her profession. She and her husband have two grown-up daughters.

Mala, an MEd in English education from Tribhuvan University, has 27 years of teaching experience. She was born in a Brahmin family in a village in Nuwakot. Although her parents had no formal education, her family belonged to an elite class in the village of that time. She grew up in a big joint family heavily influenced by the conservative values of her grandparents.

Mala's grandparents were very loving and caring of their grandchildren but were opposed to educating granddaughters. So was her father, who would follow what his parents would wish. However, her mother, bold and decisive, sent her to school and paid all her schooling costs until her parents separated from the joint family. Thereafter, her mother convinced her father to take care of the education of the

daughters as well. Her father wanted her to marry after SLC, but her elder brothers stood by her wish to complete higher education before marriage.

She did not experience any discrimination in the school although it was visible in her village, including her house in terms of education, but not on other issues, such as love and care.

She is married to a government officer and has a grown-up son. She had an interest in completing one more degree in Management, but could not. She had to give her time to her ailing in-laws, which was also her husband's expectation. Not to make it an issue in the family, she gave up her interest.

Gyanu has a BSC degree from West Bengal, India and an MEd in English education from Tribhuvan University. She has teaching experience of 35 years. She was born in Bhaktapur to a Chhetri family. However, she stayed in India with her father, a central employee in the government of India, up to her graduate studies. She returned to Nepal in 2050 BS, after her marriage to an army officer from Bhaktapur.

Her post-marriage life was very challenging. Her husband used to be away from home most of the time during his service. Her in-laws were strict. They did not expect her to teach and study. All they wanted of her was to stay home and take care of all domestic chores as a loyal *buhari* (daughter in law).

Unable to manage time for her profession and study, while taking care of children, she went to her maternal house where her parents helped her. After her husband's retirement, she returned back to her house. By then, they had been changed. She also realised the importance of compromise and negotiation with in-laws.

Currently, she holds the position of Vice Principal in a secondary school in Kathmandu. She is happy with what she has been able to do. She wished she could do

more, but could not due to the problem of household management and professional responsibility.

Uma, an MEd in English from Tribhuvan University, has 29 years of teaching experience, including a two-year experience of teaching in a private boarding school. She was born to just-literate parents in a middle-class Newar family in Kathmandu. Her father was a chef and her mother a housewife.

The youngest child in the family, she did not experience any discrimination in the family in getting an education. However, she grew up with her friends who faced discrimination. Her brother and sister are also educated and always supported and inspired her to study and build a good career.

After marriage, however, she faced many challenges. Her husband's family was a joint one. It was quite strict as well. Her in-laws would want their *buhari* to focus on housework like any other *buhari* in a traditional sense. No one would share her burden and it was very difficult to manage time for household work and profession. Her husband was—and is—good and supportive of her. But he would not share her housework burden in the presence of his parents.

Now she lives in a single family with a husband and children. Life is far easier than before. Her husband encourages and supports her in her professional work. He also shares the housework burden. She has two grown-up children.

Kalika has an MEd in English Education from Tribhuvan University. She has 15 years of teaching experience, including six years as a secondary-level permanent teacher. She was born to banker parents in an upper-middle-class family in Hetauda. Most of her schooling was in Sarlahi, where her parents were employed. She did her BEd from Hetauda.

Her upbringing was tightly regulated. She had to strictly comply with family rules and regulations as she grew up. To go away from home would require parents' permission. She grew up with two elder brothers.

She is married to an engineer from an upper-middle-class traditional Newar family in Lalitpur. Post-marriage, she had to deal with stricter regulations of the upper-middle-class Newar family, which would basically expect *buharis* (*daughter in-laws*) not to work outside the family or family-owned business institutions. In the eyes of the family tradition, a professional *buhari* does not add to family prestige, she explains.

Kalika loves teaching and wishes to give it as much as she can. She also likes to participate in professional development activities, such as workshops and training events. However, it often becomes challenging for her to manage time. When professional and domestic responsibilities conflict, she chooses the latter, as she does not want her to be an issue of family discord and conflict. She lives in a joint family with her husband, in-laws and kids.

Rita, an M. Ed. in English education from Tribhuvan University, has 20 years of teaching experience, including a 14-year experience of teaching in private schools. She did her Bed and MEd concurrently while teaching, which she started immediately after IEd.

Born in Dhankuta, to a government officer father and a housewife mother, she spent her childhood and adulthood in a village in Dhankuta, which is her maternal home. Both her parents were aware of the value of education and committed to educating all their six children, including a son and five daughters, although financially they were just moderate. She and her three sisters have a Master's degree and her brother is pursuing his postdoc In China.

After completing an IEd from Dhankuta Multiple Campus, she started teaching in a private boarding school while pursuing a BEd as a part-time student. This was to help her father financially which was required to support educating her sisters. She is married to a Campus teacher who fully supports her in her professional engagement as well as in housework. They have two children and live in Kathmandu.

Manvi, an MPhil in English Education from Kathmandu University, has 20 years of experience in teaching English in both private and public schools. For the last eight years, she has been teaching English in a higher secondary school in Kathmandu.

She was born to educated parents in a middle-class Brahmin family in Biratnagar. Her Father is a retired government employee. Her mother too used to be a government employee for a few years, but she quit the profession to give full time to family and children. Manvi grew up in a semi-equal environment. While she did not experience any discrimination in terms of education, she had to participate in housework, unlike her brother. No parents would want her brother to do any homework. This would irritate her at times, but could not express it as her father had a conservative attitude in this regard. In hindsight, she finds this discriminating treatment rewarding, as it made her independent and confident in terms of multi-tasking and time management.

She started teaching after completing Ten Plus Two from her home district while parallely continuing her studies. After her Bachelor's, she got married and came to Kathmandu. She did her Master's in Education while teaching in a private school and taking care of her first child. After MEd, she moved to a public school and completed her MPhil while teaching.

Unlike many other women English language teachers, Manvi's in-laws are very supportive of her education and profession. So is her husband. Now she is a mother of two.

Table 1. *Profile of Participants*

| S.N. | Pseudonym | Caste/Ethnicity | Education | Position/Role | Experience |
|------|-----------|-----------------|------------|-------------------------|------------|
| 1 | Kripa | Chhetri | MPhil | Secondary Level Teacher | 12 years |
| 2 | Mina | Brahmin | MA, Bed | Secondary Level Teacher | 17 years |
| 3 | Pramila | Brahmin | MEd, MPhil | Secondary Level Teacher | 23 years |
| 4 | Sama | Brahmin | PhD | Secondary Level Teacher | 18 years |
| 5 | Sani | Brahmin | MEd, MPhil | Secondary Level Teacher | 10 years |
| 6 | Anita | Tamang | MPhil | Secondary Level Teacher | 17 years. |
| 7 | Binu | Brahmin | MEd | Secondary Level Teacher | 5 years |
| 8 | Mala | Brahmin | MEd | Secondary Level Teacher | 18 years |
| 9 | Gyanu | Chhetri | MEd | Vice Principal | 35 years |
| 10 | Uma | Newar | MEd | Secondary Level Teacher | 29 years |
| 11 | Rita | Rai | MEd | Secondary Level Teacher | 20 years |
| 12 | Kalika | Newar | MEd | Secondary Level Teacher | 15 years |
| 13 | Sharala | Brahmin | MEd | Secondary Level Teacher | 5 years |
| 14 | Manvi | Brahmin | MPhil | Secondary Level Teacher | 20 years |

Note. Source: Field research conducted by the author

Procedures of Data Collection

The study adopted a two-phase qualitative data collection process to ensure depth, reliability and credibility of findings. In the first round, conducted from March to July 2022, all 14 participants were engaged through semi-structured interviews to gather comprehensive data on their experiences. The second round, from November 2022 to February 2023, involved seven participants to validate initial findings, address gaps and conduct member checking. This process entailed sharing preliminary themes and interpretations with the subsample to confirm accuracy, enhancing the trustworthiness of the results. The two-phase approach allowed iterative refinement, with insights from the first round informing targeted discussions in the second to ensure robust and credible findings.

Methods of Data Collection

To capture the complex and context-bound experiences of female English language teachers, this study has employed multiple qualitative data collection methods. The primary method involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews. It was complemented by informal conversations and reflective field notes. This triangulated approach facilitated a richer, more nuanced understanding of participants' perspectives and realities.

Semi-Structured Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the participants' workplaces to collect data. Each interview lasted approximately three hours on average and took the form of free-flowing interactions, based on a semi-structured discussion guide (Appendix 1) with the main research questions. Given the depth and length of the discussions, some interviews were completed in multiple sittings. For example, one discussion was paused halfway as the participant needed to attend an administrative call, with the remainder conducted the following day. In another instance, three sittings were arranged because the participant could spare only 45 minutes per session. Additionally, one participant chose to discuss on a holiday at my home, as her daughter wished to spend the day on an outing. There was also a case where I had to wait a whole day in school to talk to a participant whenever she could manage time, which could not be determined in advance.

Before the actual interviews, a preliminary telephone conversation was held with each participant. During this call, participants were informed about the title of the study and the broad topics to be discussed. This conversation also addressed logistical issues, such as the interview's location and timing and helped establish initial rapport.

Before face-to-face meetings, the purpose of the interview was reconveyed to each participant. Their consent was sought to use quotes as relevant and necessary in the dissertation, with anonymity assured in all quotes and presentations, which was respected throughout the research process.

A significant portion of the initial discussion focused on participants' personal, demographic and educational backgrounds, including their school education, family and social environments and current socio-familial status. This background information was vital for building trust and mutual understanding—essential elements in qualitative research methods, including phenomenology—to elicit open, honest, credible and barrier-free responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell, 2013; Brewer, 2000).

The interview discussions were structured according to the main research questions. The first part centred on participants' views and experiences of professional development. The second part explored their knowledge and perspectives on the professional development resources and opportunities available to them. The third addressed their assessments of gaps, challenges and obstacles. The fourth part focused on their experiences in dealing with these gaps and challenges. The final part elicited their views on how the professional development environment could be improved.

All participants shared their experiences as women English language teachers, highlighting their gendered identity alongside their professional role. Additionally, participants were invited to reflect on their 'self' and their 'profession.' Although this was not directly tied to the research questions, it was included with the belief that such reflections would enrich the thematic discussions and analysis.

Simultaneously, the following methods were used to complement the interviews to enhance the depth and contextual richness of the findings:

Informal Conversations

As briefly discussed above, informal conversations were conducted both before and after the formal interviews to establish trust and rapport with the participants and to express gratitude for their time, which is essential for eliciting open and honest responses. These interactions also helped gather additional contextual information about the participants' work environments and daily routines that might not emerge in structured interviews. Moreover, informal conversations were useful for negotiating convenient meeting times and venues and for clarifying or reconfirming points raised during the interviews. All this was necessary to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data collected.

Field Notes

Reflective memos and field notes were maintained consistently throughout the data collection process to capture emerging insights, researcher reflections and contextual details that could influence interpretation. These notes documented non-verbal cues during interviews, unexpected occurrences and thoughts on participant responses. They were instrumental for tracking the development of themes and in maintaining reflexivity, thereby enhancing the credibility and depth of the qualitative analysis.

Data Analysis and Interpretation Procedure

The data analysis followed the phases outlined by Leavy (2023) and Braun and Clarke (2006), which include data preparation and organisation, initial immersion, coding, categorising and theming and interpretation. These steps provided

a structured framework for the iterative analysis, allowing patterns and themes to emerge while staying grounded in the data.

To ensure data quality, discussions were recorded through two approaches: field notes documented key points, verbal responses and non-verbal cues (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), while audio recordings preserved all details. The recordings, conducted in Nepali, were directly transcribed into English during the process of computerising the notes and audio recordings. The analysis employed intelligent verbatim transcription techniques (McMullin, 2023), where only relevant expressions and clues were transcribed. This approach ensured that the essence of participant expressions was carefully preserved. Memoing during transcription facilitated reflective insights. It contributed to bridging the raw data with theoretical constructs.

Initial Familiarisation and Memoing. The analysis began with familiarising myself with the data through field notes and audio recordings. Then the notes were computerised for easy access and organisation. Memoing was integral to both transcription and coding. It allowed for immediate documentation of emerging insights and ensured consistency with the research priorities (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Systematic Coding and Thematic Organisation. The analysis was marked by systematic coding and thematic organisation, aimed at identifying patterns that directly addressed the research questions. For example, one theme centred on teachers' perceptions of professional development opportunities, while another explored the challenges they face in accessing these opportunities. This ensured that the data remained aligned with the research focus and enabled a deeper exploration of participants' responses under the focus area.

Response tables were used to systematically organise data. They enabled easy cross-referencing between questions, answers and participant details. The first research question was divided into ‘knowledge’ and ‘challenges and opportunities’ to deepen the thematic analysis along these sub-themes. Other questions were treated as a single theme.

Validation and Participant Engagement. The second round of interviews with six participants addressed gaps in the data, validated transcriptions and ensured accurate representation of their perspectives. In addition, once data recording and transcription were completed, another round of validation was conducted, involving face-to-face meetings with some participants and telephone conversations with others. This multi-stage validation process strengthened the study’s rigour and ensured participant validation, a crucial aspect of qualitative research integrity (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Hermeneutic and Thematic Interpretation. The data analysis employed the Hermeneutic Circle, a process that emphasises the continuous interplay between individual data points and broader theoretical frameworks. This iterative approach involved moving between the parts and the whole. This process deepened understanding by revisiting and refining individual statements in light of the overall context. Thematic exploration was shaped by both the richness of the data and the interpretive frameworks guiding the analysis, ensuring that meaning evolved and was refined throughout the process.

Steps in Data Analysis and Interpretation. The data analysis followed a structured and step-wise process (as presented in Appendix 2) to ensure a thorough interpretation of the findings by capturing the nuances of participants’ experiences. The steps involved were as follows:

Thematic Analysis. Main themes for data analysis were derived from the research questions. Subthemes were developed from commonalities and contradictory statements of the participants. This process offered depth and alternative perspectives.

Review and Cross-Verification of Data: Field notes were cross-referenced with audio transcripts and follow-up interviews. Follow-up interviews helped verify transcriptions as well as address identified gaps.

Selection of Representative Quotes: Key quotes were selected to highlight thematic patterns, illustrating participant voices and connecting findings to theoretical concepts.

Hermeneutic Circle: Specific data points were examined against themes and broader theoretical frameworks iteratively. This back-and-forth tallying ensured that individual responses were not viewed in isolation but were continually re-examined in relation to the overall context of the study.

Coding and Categorisation: Data were then organised into clusters—aligned with the main themes (research questions)—reflecting participants’ shared and unique experiences.

This structured and iterative analysis illuminates the professional development of women English language teachers in Nepal. It addresses the specificities of the research while contributing to broader discussions on gender, education and professional development. The alignment of methodology with qualitative research principles, iterative data analysis, and data verification with participants enhances the credibility of the study and provides a foundation for future research.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Processual robustness is essential for establishing validity and trustworthiness in qualitative research (Hayashi et al., 2021). Credibility, which is similar to validity

in quantitative research, refers to the accuracy and truthfulness of the findings of the study. Credibility depends on how the research is designed, the types of questions asked during data collection and the steps taken to minimise misrepresentation (Creswell, 2013; Cypress, 2017; Peoples, 2021).

Research methodology literature outlines several strategies to ensure rigour and trustworthiness in qualitative research. They include triangulation, thick description, member checking and researcher reflexivity (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Cypress, 2017; Peoples, 2021). Below, I explain how I have adhered to these strategies and principles, along with other relevant features that contribute to the trustworthiness of this study.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a key strategy to ensure the robustness and reliability of findings by drawing on multiple sources or methods to corroborate results. In this study, I employed triangulation in both data collection and analysis to "develop converging lines of inquiry" (Yin, 2016, p. 87) and identify "links between different categories, concepts and/or themes" (Leavy, 2023, p. 167). This process enabled me to cross-check data gathered from multiple sources—interviews, informal discussions and document reviews—and identify recurring themes or patterns across data sources.

Additionally, I applied triangulation to ensure theoretical alignment. By comparing insights derived from different theoretical lenses—such as patriarchy, feminism and agency—I ensured the study's consistency in how these perspectives were incorporated into the findings. This process not only strengthened the validity of the interpretations of the study but also helped confirm that the findings were not confined to any single theoretical viewpoint. This was to enhance the richness of the

analysis. This approach is a widely accepted practice in qualitative research, particularly when working with complex social phenomena (Yin, 2016; Leavy, 2023).

Prolonged Engagement

Prolonged engagement is crucial for building rapport with participants and ensuring that the data collected reflects their true experiences. As briefly touched on above, I spent considerable time both before and during the interviews with each participant, which helped strengthen trust and allowed me to gather rich and meaningful data.

Prior to fieldwork, I engaged in multiple discussions with my supervisor and peers to ensure alignment between my ontological position, research questions, research method and participant selection. This process helped refine my research questions and ensured that the data collection methods were appropriately designed to capture the information necessary for my study. Before conducting the interviews, I took time to establish rapport with the participants and ensured that they fully understood the purpose of the research, which is vital for gaining informed consent.

Additionally, I allowed ample time for participants to share their experiences. If a single interview was not enough, I arranged follow-up sessions to ensure that participants had the opportunity to express themselves fully. For example, one discussion had to be split over two days, as the participant had to cut it short due to an administrative call. In another instance, a participant could spare only 45 minutes per day, which required me to visit her three times. Similarly, a participant initially met with me at her school, but due to time constraints and the need to care for her young child, she volunteered to come to my home, as her daughter wanted to spend some time away from home, for a follow-up interview. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I

adapted by conducting some interviews virtually to maintain prolonged engagement despite the challenges.

This approach is grounded in the belief that prolonged engagement leads to more accurate and authentic communication (Yin, 2016, p. 87), allowing participants to share their experiences without feeling rushed or constrained by time.

Rich and Thick Description

In qualitative research, rich and thick descriptions provide the depth and context necessary for understanding the lived experiences of participants. In line with this, I used detailed narratives and direct quotes from participants to accurately capture their perspectives. These descriptions serve as a critical bridge between the participants' subjective experiences and the researcher's interpretations, ensuring that the voices of participants are preserved in their authentic forms. Rich and thick descriptions shift the interpretation of data from being solely researcher-centred to one that reflects the participants' meanings within their social and cultural contexts (Leavy, 2023; Yin, 2016).

By providing these detailed accounts, I aimed to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences by ensuring that the final interpretation aligned closely with the original meanings the participants intended to convey.

Member Checking

Member checking is a vital method for enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It entails sharing data and preliminary interpretations with participants to ensure their perspectives are accurately represented (Birt et al., 2016). In this study, I implemented a two-phase member checking process following the initial data

collection (March-July 2022) involving 14 participants. The first round of member checking, conducted between November 2022 and February 2023 after the initial analysis, involved seven purposively selected participants reflecting the sample's demographic and perspective diversity. Their feedback confirmed the accuracy of the analysis and the stability of themes.

The second phase, carried out between November and December 2024, engaged five participants—some of whom had participated in the first round—to verify specific quotes and interpretations after the dissertation draft was prepared. This approach aligns with Guest et al.'s (2020) recommendation that a representative subsample can confirm thematic stability in homogeneous samples post-saturation.

This multi-phase strategy balanced methodological rigour with ethical sensitivity. It also minimised participant burden given the sensitive nature of the study and the participants' demanding schedules. By clearly showing each step of data collection, analysis and interpretation, I ensured the study was credible, consistent with Birt et al.'s (2016) emphasis on clear reporting to ensure credibility. Overall, this iterative process highlights a commitment to ethical, high-quality qualitative research and enhances the depth and reliability of the findings.

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing is another strategy I employed to enhance the credibility of the research. This process involves engaging with colleagues to challenge and refine the research process. I conducted regular debriefing sessions with peers who were either pursuing or had recently completed their PhDs. These sessions provided critical feedback on various aspects of the study, from refining research questions to enhancing data analysis and interpretation.

In the early stages of the study, peer debriefing helped me clarify my research questions and refine my research instruments. In the later stages, the feedback from colleagues offered new perspectives that enriched the data organisation and analysis, enhancing the overall rigour and credibility of the research. Peer debriefing helped me ensure that the research process was not only transparent but also subject to external scrutiny, which is crucial in strengthening the overall validity of qualitative research.

Researcher's Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a critical component of qualitative research. It ensures transparency and a conscious acknowledgement of the researcher's influence on the study's processes and findings. Throughout this research, I remained mindful of my dual role—as a researcher and as a woman English language teacher—which inevitably shaped how I engaged with the data and interpreted participants' narratives. This positionality provided me with both unique insights and potential biases, which I continuously reflected upon to maintain a balanced and ethical approach to analysis. Recognising that complete objectivity is neither possible nor desirable in qualitative inquiry, I embraced my subjectivity as a resource that could deepen the understanding of the complex realities faced by the participants.

Drawing from my own lived experiences, I found common ground with the participants in encountering institutional neglect and limited formal recognition and sharing a commitment to professional growth despite systemic barriers. My journey—through informal professional networks, self-initiated learning and exposure to diverse national and international pedagogical approaches—allowed me to contribute not only as an observer but also as an active participant within the research context. This dual engagement helped me ground the study in the lived realities of Nepal's educational environment and foster a nuanced interpretation of the findings. It also

underscored the value of reflexivity in bridging personal experience with scholarly inquiry.

To uphold the integrity of the participants' voices, I have been transparent about my positionality and mindful not to let my own perspectives overshadow their experiences. My reflexive practice involved ongoing critical self-examination to ensure that interpretations remained faithful to participants' meanings while incorporating my professional understanding. Throughout the dissertation, the use of first-person pronouns signals this reflexive stance and invites readers into the dialogic process between researcher and participants. Ultimately, this self-awareness has been integral to producing an authentic, credible and ethically sound representation of the professional development experiences of women English language teachers in Nepal

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are foundational to ensuring the integrity and credibility of research. While there is ongoing debate among scholars about the application of ethical guidelines in qualitative research (Wiles, 2013), I adhere to core ethical principles that ensure the study is conducted with integrity and respect for participants' rights.

Beneficence, the principle of minimising harm and risk, guided my interactions with participants. Although the study does not involve sensitive private information, I remain mindful of participants' emotional well-being. For example, I avoided probing into sensitive personal issues, such as the lack of spousal support, which some participants mentioned but did not wish to explore further. This approach helped mitigate any undue burden on participants while respecting their emotional boundaries.

Respect for persons is ensured by obtaining informed consent from all participants. While the consent was communicated verbally, I made sure that participants clearly understood the purpose of the study, their role in it and how their contributions would be used in the dissertation. Participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time without explanation and none raised objections to the consent process. I have also anonymised the participants' identities, as per their preference, to ensure confidentiality.

Finally, integrity is maintained throughout the research process. I ensure that participants are fully aware of how their data will be used and how their confidentiality will be protected. I also respect the ethical guidelines of the institutions where the participants work, ensuring that the research process does not interfere with their professional responsibilities. While I did not engage directly with the school administration, I encouraged each participant to inform the administration about the discussions that would take place within the school premises. Throughout the study, I remained committed to transparency and honesty, avoiding any form of deception in my interactions with participants.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlines the theoretical frameworks and methodology of the study, grounded in a qualitative research design. The study employs a combined theoretical lens of sociocultural theory, the capability approach, feminism and patriarchy, with interpretivism serving as the paradigmatic orientation. This orientation allows for insights to emerge from the lived experiences of women English language teachers and guides the interpretation of data in alignment with theoretical frameworks.

Data was collected through a phenomenological design involving interviews with 14 women English language teachers from community schools in Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur. Each interview, guided by predetermined guiding questions aligning with the research objectives, lasted approximately three hours.

The data analysis followed a structured and simultaneous process, where data collection and analysis occurred concurrently. This approach aimed to summarise information, identify patterns and themes and derive meaning. It involved reviewing field notes, cross-verifying these notes with audio transcripts, conducting follow-up interviews and comparing participant statements. A comprehensive reading and analysis process facilitated the identification of key themes.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, I allowed participants ample time to express themselves freely, even if their narratives diverged from the main topic. Any ambiguities noted during the interviews were clarified immediately. I employed rich and thick descriptions in the analysis and conducted two rounds of member checking: the first after preliminary data analysis and the second after completing data analysis and theme development.

Regarding ethical considerations, I adhered to the principles of beneficence (minimising harm), respect for persons (obtaining informed consent and protecting confidentiality) and integrity (maintaining transparency and avoiding deception). I clearly explained the purpose of the study, my role as a researcher and the expected contributions of the participants while seeking their informed consent.

Chapter Four

Teacher Professional Development Experiences and Horizons

This chapter explores the professional development experiences of the participants, providing a foundation for the subsequent analytical chapters. The analysis draws on interview transcripts, the researcher's field notes and observation memos, incorporating both paraphrased and verbatim accounts of the data. The presentation is organised thematically around the main research questions, highlighting key sub-themes that emerged during the study.

To contextualise the findings, brief profiles of the participants are provided, focusing on their family background, educational experiences and professional achievements. Pseudonyms have been assigned to each participant to ensure confidentiality, as agreed during the interviews, and the names and locations of their schools have been withheld for the same reason.

This chapter examines the knowledge, experiences, challenges, opportunities, strategies and future aspirations of women English language teachers, offering insight into the multiple dimensions of their professional development. It explores how participants articulate their learning and experiences, perceive available resources and opportunities, navigate gaps and challenges, employ strategies to overcome obstacles and envision ways to improve their professional development environment in the future. This thematic framing ensures that all aspects of the research questions are addressed, providing a comprehensive understanding of TPD in the context of English language teaching in Nepal.

Participant Responses

As stated above, the analysis and interpretation follow the order of the research questions. As such, the first sub-section presents the respondents' knowledge

and experiences about professional development; the second sub-section discusses the ‘resources and opportunities’ available for professional development; the third sub-section concentrates on the ‘gaps, challenges and obstacles’ to professional development, while the fourth presents women English language teachers’ initiatives against challenges and obstacles. The final sub-section presents the respondent’s suggestion to improve the ‘professional development environment’ in the country.

Knowledge and Experiences

In this sub-section, participants’ knowledge, ideas and perceptions about professional development have been analysed and interpreted. The respondents see and explain teacher professional development as a continuous process of learning that takes place in one’s social and cultural context, both formally and informally. It is also the unlearning of tacit beliefs and assumptions that obstruct or delay one’s learning of new ideas; the skills and capacity to relate with—and motivate—students; and the self-motivation to learn and develop oneself as competent English language teachers.

Continuous Learning. All the respondents explain professional development as a process of continuous learning that helps a teacher grow professionally while building his/her expertise to make classroom performance effective. They also share that learning takes place through formal processes (training, workshops, and so on) as well as informal discussions. Each of these types, they suggest, contributes to the development and consolidation of a teacher’s knowledge base and skill set, which ultimately contributes to English Language Teaching.

To Binu, teaching in general is a dynamic profession. It requires continuous learning to stay updated on emerging issues and ideas. For English language teachers, learning is an inseparable part of their professional life. To them, the completion of

academic training is just the beginning—the first step towards competence, which must be continually developed to meet the demands of effective teaching. This is how Binu elaborates on what she means:

Teaching English as a second language is not the same as teaching Nepali or other subjects. An English teacher needs two types of competencies. One is instructional ability in English, and the other is knowledge of the subject matter. The knowledge we gain from academic courses is often basic and theoretical, which is not sufficient to address the practical challenges we encounter in the classroom. Without continuous reading, we cannot be updated about recent developments and cannot teach effectively. (Interview, 25 June 2022)

Building on this view, Gyanu reinforces the idea that English teaching requires more than what is expected of other subject teachers. She emphasises that English teachers must possess both pedagogical and content knowledge, which are constantly evolving. Keeping pace with these changes, she argues, demands sustained and proactive learning:

English language teachers should learn more than other subject teachers. For them, continuous learning is necessary to remain updated about the content, new methods, and all kinds of changes taking place in the field of teaching, learning, and instructional practices. Unlike some other subjects, English teaching requires constant adaptation to new linguistic trends and communicative demands. (Gyanu, interview, June 21, 2022)

Manvi shares Binu's and Gyanu's observations, emphasising that continuous learning is essential for English language teachers to stay updated on pedagogical skills, which are constantly evolving. Her view reinforces the idea that professional

growth in English language teaching requires ongoing engagement beyond initial training. Mina and Kripa also agree with Binu, Gyanu and Manvi, adding that informal learning—such as post-training workshops, discussions, and interactions on teaching-learning processes and issues—is equally important, especially for English language teachers.

Central to the participants' reflection is the view that there is some difference in what one gains from formal and informal learning. According to Mina, “formal training is necessary for all teachers to acquire pedagogical knowledge and skills” (Interview, March 2, 2022). As for informal learning, Kripa underscores that “issue-based or thematic workshops are important to enhance one's general knowledge and develop the appetite for self-study” (Interview, April 8, 2022).

In participants' reasoning, formal learning—such as academic training—creates the foundation for teaching. Informal learning—such as thematic discussions or unorganised interactions—builds on this foundation and enriches it in light of new developments. While formal training tends to follow a structured curriculum, informal learning offers the flexibility to explore emerging issues, adapt to context-specific challenges and build professional networks.

Almost all participants consistently stress the importance of refresher training as a component of continuous learning. Such training helps to reinforce skills acquired during formal education and to stay updated on recent developments and innovations, particularly in areas like the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in classrooms, which were not part of their initial training.

Rita succinctly captures the shared view of all respondents regarding the significance of refresher training for teachers' professional development—particularly for English language teachers—using the example of ICT:

Without ICT skills—especially the skill to use social media—we remain in an information gap compared with our students, who are of the Facebook age. In such a situation, we cannot motivate students and manage our classes effectively. To develop new skills, such as ICT, regular refreshers are necessary. (Rita, interview, March 27, 2022)

Mala and Uma highlight an additional element of continuous learning: interpersonal sharing among colleagues. Learning from peer experiences and good practices can help resolve classroom management problems or provide insights to motivate students. Context-specific strategies adopted by teachers can offer practical ideas that formal training sessions often cannot address. In this regard, Uma says:

Besides formal training, we learn through peer discussions, departmental sharing, and action research, as formal opportunities are limited. Action research helps identify and address classroom problems, like students' speaking fluency or motivation. Schools should promote a culture of sharing and collective problem-solving among peers, covering both academic and personal issues. (Interview, June 20, 2022)

In sum, participants view continuous learning as an essential aspect of professional development, especially for English language teachers. They highlight the complementary roles of formal and informal learning, the necessity of refresher training to address evolving educational demands and the value of collegial sharing and action research. These diverse but interconnected practices reinforce the idea that professional growth must be ongoing, needs-responsive and collaborative to be effective.

Self-Learning. Building on the idea of continuous learning, participants also highlight self-learning as a critical dimension of professional development—one that

relies on individual initiative rather than structured opportunities. Several participants, including Kripa, Sani and Anita, emphasise that self-learning is necessary to supplement formal training and also to remain updated and intellectually engaged. In the absence of institutional support, self-learning emerges as a flexible, self-directed and often empowering mode of professional growth. Self-learning is shaped by each teacher's motivation, access to resources and ability to navigate multiple responsibilities.

Self-learning is described as a multifaceted process that offers both practical and intellectual benefits. For Anita, it serves not only as a substitute for limited formal opportunities but also as a crucial means to deepen and test her prior professional knowledge:

For me, self-learning includes reading print books, exploring online resources like journals and articles, and engaging in everyday interactions with students, colleagues, and school administrators. Such interactions often spark new ideas or challenge what I previously assumed to be correct. In my case, self-learning has become the main source of my professional development. It helps me stay current, think critically about my teaching practices, and grow as a teacher on my own terms. (Interview, April 10, 2022)

Unlike structured training, self-learning is not constrained by fixed schedules, expert supervision, or formal formats. Instead, it can be organised flexibly, based on one's preferences and available time. Participants find it especially useful for testing theoretical knowledge, keeping up with new developments, identifying emerging learning areas and strengthening problem-solving skills.

For Kripa, as for Anita, self-learning can be sparked by anything that provides pedagogical insights—from a simple Google search to reading online books and

journals, reflecting on peer classroom experiences, or observing student behaviour both inside and outside the classroom (interview, April 8, 2022). Sani adds that social media platforms, such as Facebook, can also serve as valuable tools for self-learning, noting that even informal posts and everyday expressions can offer meaningful insights. Echoing this view, Manvi points out that online platforms not only support self-learning but also help discover additional professional development opportunities, such as workshops, training sessions, and conferences.

However, self-learning requires strong motivation and commitment to balance different tasks. According to Kripa, managing time for self-learning is very challenging. Anita elaborates that the challenge stems from women teachers having to perform many roles and responsibilities compared to their male counterparts.

The participants' views suggest that self-learning is a deeply personal yet professionally vital strategy for English language teachers to enhance both their knowledge and classroom practice. Its flexibility and self-directed nature make it particularly appealing in resource-constrained settings. However, the burden of balancing multiple responsibilities—especially among women teachers—can limit its full potential. Despite these challenges, participants do not view self-learning merely as a substitute for institutional support. Rather, they see it as a dynamic process of intellectual engagement, pedagogical renewal and self-empowerment. It enables teachers to grow on their own terms, reinforcing their professional agency in navigating systemic limitations.

Unlearning Old Habits. Respondents suggest that, like learning new ideas, unlearning old habits is equally necessary for professional development. This process of unlearning should involve all teachers—both male and female—as well as school

administrators. The respondents add that each of them holds habits, worldviews and orientations that need to be reconsidered.

According to Mina, male teachers and administrators often take it for granted that women teachers cannot manage time for leadership and do not offer them such opportunities. Such reasoning—reported by most participants in one way or another—reflects a patriarchal worldview that denies women teachers opportunities and reinforces the notion that school is fundamentally a male institution. She identifies such an attitude and belief to be unlearned by male teachers and administrators as a matter of priority.

Sama agrees with Mina and, thus, gives an example of the old habit that male colleagues and administrators should unlearn to make school an equal institution:

The attitude of male superiority is very deep in my school. Male teachers feel so superior that they find it humiliating to recognise women teachers' expertise, interact with them, and encourage and promote them. Male teachers still holding such a patriarchal attitude is disturbing. It spoils the whole teaching learning environment. (Sama, interview, May 5, 2022)

It is not only male teachers and administrators who bring old habits to school. As Anita explains below, women teachers, including English language teachers, also do so. This is evident in their reluctance to participate in professional development events when such participation requires leaving home or involves additional time and responsibility. In some cases, they directly say 'no' to such opportunities; in others, they cite justifications such as the need to stay close to family members or care for elderly in-laws. While these reasons may be genuine, Anita argues that this hesitation to take on extra responsibility or risk unintentionally reinforces the societal belief that women are incapable of handling professional duties. She elaborates:

If we don't fulfil our duty, to accept the challenge that comes before us, such as participation in training, and say 'no' or 'not' to such things making one or another pretence, we reinforce patriarchal ideology that we cannot do, we are inferior, we are weak, cannot handle professional job, only good for household. We should not fall into the trap. We should stop doing so. We should also change our habits and be bold and ready to take the challenge.

(Anita, interview, April 11, 2022)

Other habits that women English language teachers should give up include gossiping and backbiting, which, according to Binu, are prevalent among women teachers of all subjects. The bearers of such habits are often suspicious of colleagues, the school environment, school administration and even a training or learning opportunity offered to the persons, she suggests. Sama shares Binu's observation and adds:

The majority of women teachers enjoy backbiting, even targeting other women teachers. They do not show any interest in professional development, do not think beyond home and do not feel that they can do what male teachers can do. They make no effort to build their ability to claim their space.

(Interview, May 5, 2022)

These narratives highlight that unlearning old habits is not merely a matter of personal growth. It is also a collective responsibility for transforming schools into equitable professional spaces. As the participants self-critique, women English language teachers must resist disempowering themselves by internalising beliefs and routines shaped by patriarchal norms that directly constrain their capacity to grow as efficient English language educators. When teachers view themselves primarily through the household lens or habitually respond to professional opportunities with

resignation or self-doubt, they inadvertently reinforce the very structures that limit their advancement.

In this light, unlearning constricting habits becomes both a personal responsibility and a political act—one that actively challenges the gendered hierarchies embedded in school culture. For meaningful change to occur, both women and men must critically examine and unlearn these inherited orientations. Only then can schools begin to embody genuine equality and support the professional development of all teachers, particularly those navigating the dual demands of gender and professional identity in the field of English language teaching.

Skills and Capacities to Relate with Students. The participants suggest that teacher professional development should also include components that empower teachers with skills and capacity to relate to their students, both on academic and non-academic issues. According to Kalika, professional development entails a teacher's ability to understand students' interests, emotions, and feelings, and to integrate these into classroom activities in ways that motivate all learners. Rita agrees with Kalika. To her, teacher professional development is not just the knowledge of the subject matter. It is more:

A good teacher should be able to understand child psychology, possess stress management skills, and have the ability to apply these skills in classroom teaching and other interactions. A teacher also requires communication skills. A professional development package should include these elements, especially for English language teachers, who work under stress. (Rita, interview, April 10, 2022)

Manvi adds that effective English language teaching is not possible unless teachers are aware of their students' cognitive development and psychological needs.

For Mala, professional development means a teacher's ability to keep pace with students by staying informed about emerging ideas and trends, particularly those disseminated through social media and other digital platforms. Likewise, Uma emphasises the importance of patience and empathetic listening as essential relational skills that all teachers should build. However, she argues that such skills should be mandatory for women teachers across all subjects, including English, as students—particularly girls—tend to feel more comfortable confiding in them. She further adds:

When girl students want to share their problems and seek advice on uncertainty, a woman teacher should have the patience to listen to their problems and help them find a way out. If women teachers are not available, the students feel neglected and helpless. Empathetic listening should, therefore, be a part of teacher professional development, which every woman teacher, both of English language and other subjects, should develop. (Uma, interview, June 20, 2022)

As the participants concur, teacher professional development must extend beyond subject expertise to encompass relational and emotional competencies. Skills such as understanding student psychology, managing stress and practising empathetic communication are viewed as essential, particularly for English language teachers working in high-pressure contexts. Notably, women teachers are regarded as emotional support providers to girl students. This highlights the need for gender-responsive and socio-emotional components in professional development programmes.

Collaborative and Reflective Learning. Almost all respondents suggest that one also learns and develops professional competence from collaborative interactions and reflective practices. While experience sharing enhances interpersonal learning

from one another's good practices, reflective discussions help find areas of self-improvement, which can be readily addressed. Such exercises contribute to addressing the gap in the absence of formal learning opportunities to some extent.

To Uma, a collaborative learning environment is a very basic facility and culture that each school should provide and establish. Facilitating interpersonal learning does not involve costs or any other administrative burden, she says. Even if some costs are incurred, they are far more nominal than the benefits they produce. Uma thus gives an example of the relevance of interpersonal sharing: "Issues like why students do not speak in the classroom and how to enhance their participation in learning activities can be addressed through experience sharing" (interview, June 20, 2022).

Sharala also finds interpersonal sharing an important means of learning, especially problem-based learning, which she wants to be a part of the school calendar so that it becomes institutionalised. Rita agrees with Sharala that interpersonal sharing is important for professional development and reports that her school has an enabling environment for doing so.

In our school, we have the space for sharing knowledge as well as problems among teachers. When we encounter any problem, we collectively explore its solution. Likewise, if we have any learning to share, we do so among English as well as non-English teachers.

Everyone gets involved in both the problem and learning sharing.

(Interview, March 27, 2022)

The respondents also underline the value of reflective exercises as a part of collaborative learning. Binu underscores that reflective exercises help them learn from their practices and find their comparative level of competence and expertise

among their peers. It is a useful tool to assess one's strengths and areas of improvement. However, she adds, not all schools, including her own, provide a dedicated time to engage in reflection and learning from it.

In some schools, particularly those headed by women, some space is available for reflection, collaboration and interpersonal learning. Kalika's school is one of those to provide an enabling environment for collaboration and sharing. This is how they share and interact for learning:

We exchange information about learning opportunities when we know about them, and participate in them. After participation, the learning insights are shared among all colleagues. We also share our problems and learning needs in staff meetings and collectively explore ways to their solutions. We have such an environment mainly because we have a woman principal, which I should highlight. (Kalika, interview, June 13, 2023)

Manvi's school administration also offers space for interpersonal sharing and reflection. However, her colleagues, mainly males and also some females, are not forthcoming. "They fear that interpersonal sharing and reflection may expose their weakness and avoid participating in them" (interview, March 2, 2022). When her teacher colleagues hesitate to engage in learning, the administration does not find it worthwhile to support such events.

Uma's school is like Kalika's. Her school administration is supportive and is aware of teacher professional development. It creates an environment for interpersonal learning and sharing, reflective learning, as well as other activities that teachers require as far as administratively and internally possible. They also participate in external opportunities turn-wise, although the availability of such events is limited.

Some schools provide a passive enabling environment, where the administration does not oppose teacher-led discussions and sharing, even if it offers little proactive support. To have a non-intrusive administration is also helpful, as Rita explains:

Our school does not organise a formal learning session. The school, particularly the principal, however, encourages us to internally discuss, problem-share and learn from experiences, which we do regularly through our English Department. The administration does not object to us doing so. We get their passive support, which has been helpful to us. (interview, May 5, 2022)

Rita's observation of the passive environment reflects the reality of more than half of the schools. They stay neutral when it comes to teacher professional development. They do not actively invest in it, but do not object to teachers initiating inter-personal learning as long as it does not affect the class. As the participant accounts suggest, an active environment for teacher professional development exists in some one-third of the schools, most of them being led by women as principals, vice principals and department heads.

These accounts demonstrate that collaborative and reflective learning is widely recognised by teachers as a vital component of professional development, particularly in contexts where formal training opportunities are limited. While some schools—often under the leadership of women administrators—facilitate a culture of active engagement and mutual learning, others offer only passive or conditional support. Despite these differences, the participants' emphasis on interpersonal sharing and self-reflection underscores their agency and commitment to improving their practice. Institutionalising such practices within the school calendar and culture could

play a pivotal role in sustaining meaningful professional development across the system. This is particularly important for English language teachers, who rely on an enabling environment for active discussion, collaboration and the exchange of ideas and challenges.

Generating Motivation towards Teaching. While the issue of motivation was touched upon earlier in the context of self-learning, some participants insist that it deserves specific attention as a core element of professional development. They argue that not all teachers in the profession demonstrate full motivation and commitment to teaching. In this view—shared by a number of women English language teachers—generating and sustaining motivation should be considered an explicit component of professional development, especially given its influence on teaching quality and ongoing learning.

For Sama, motivation is key to effective teaching, more so for English language teaching, which, as discussed earlier, is different from other subjects. It requires additional labour, devotion and commitment. As Sama explains:

The teachers who do not have the motivation towards their profession do not deliver effectively. In the case of English language teachers like us, who should work hard and have a deep devotion to teaching, keeping motivation alive should be a part of professional development. It can be through training or any other input. Without motivation, teaching becomes just a timepass as has been the case with most of our teacher colleagues, both males and females. (Interview, May 5, 2022)

Sani agrees with Sama and adds that teachers without motivation do not care for their professional development. Such teachers “see teaching as a routine job that

earns some money for them, and do not take teaching seriously as their duty” (interview, April 20, 2022).

The insights from Sama and Sani shift attention from professional development as a structured process to the emotional and attitudinal investment it requires. In the case of women teachers—particularly those managing domestic pressures and working in uninspiring school environments—motivation is not simply an individual trait but a response to structural conditions. For English language teachers, whose roles demand extra effort and adaptability, sustaining motivation is not optional. It is essential. Without it, professional development risks becoming irrelevant and teaching itself may lose purpose. Such a possibility ultimately weakens both teacher agency and student learning outcomes.

Resources and Opportunities

The respondents suggest that there are three broad types of professional development resources and opportunities available to them. They include government-provided resources, school-initiated processes and inputs and training and other events provided by the non-government sector.

Government-Facilitated Opportunities. More than half of the participants had the opportunity to participate in government-offered training programmes, which ranged from a month to 10 months. While some participants found the training useful, others were less enthusiastic.

Mina participated in a 10-month course-based training, which she found relevant and enriching. She described her experience as follows:

The training was for a teacher like me who had no background in formal teacher training. After the main 10-month training, I also attended a month-long follow-up. I found both training programmes useful to enhance my

knowledge of pedagogical theories and some skills as well, although they were not specifically designed for English language teaching. (Interview, March 2, 2023)

Gyanu and Binu attended a 45-day training offered by the Secondary Education Development Unit. Both reported that the training was useful in terms of content and pedagogy. Similarly, Rita took part in a 30-day training offered in two phases by the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED). Among the training contents, the ICT module stood out as particularly useful, as it addressed her immediate needs. Other components were more theoretical and knowledge-generating, but less applicable to the classroom realities of English teaching. Rita reflected:

The ICT module was practical. It responded to the problem created by the COVID-19 pandemic, which compelled all schools, including ours, to be closed. When we could not meet physically and teaching had to be shifted online, the ICT knowledge enabled us to organise classes accordingly. (Interview, March 27, 2023)

Sharala also had a mixed experience with an NCED training. Like Rita, she found the ICT module relevant. She appreciated the session on student motivation, particularly the message that teachers should stop blaming students and instead take initiative to adapt and motivate them. In her words: “The training has encouraged me to see problems as an opportunity to try something new to get close to students and make classroom activities motivating for them” (interview, March 13, 2022). However, she felt that other parts of the training were overly theoretical and too top-down to address her classroom needs.

Anita shared a similar concern, observing that the training she attended was detached from classroom realities and failed to meet her expectations for strategies that would make teaching more participatory and student-centred. Pramila added that government training programmes have become repetitive in content and delivery: “Participating in them does not add to knowledge and skills and is like a waste of time” (interview, March 11, 2022).

Taken together, the experiences show a mixed picture. While some aspects of the government-facilitated training programmes are found useful, particularly in general pedagogy, ICT skills and motivational strategies, others have limited practical application. The exposure to theory and new tools, such as ICT, was appreciated by all participants. However, the overall content was overly theoretical, repetitive and disconnected from the day-to-day challenges of English language teaching. Importantly, none of the programmes were designed specifically for English language teaching.

However, for a few respondents, even accessing such publicly funded training opportunities posed challenges. Some were unaware of training events due to a lack of information, while others faced institutional barriers to participation. For example, Anita discovered an ICT training only after it had concluded. Though she had a strong interest in attending, she noted: “I came across the training only after it was over. I regret the loss, but there was no way I could know of it, no public advertisement or notice” (interview, April 11, 2022).

Sani, on the other hand, was aware of a training opportunity she was eager to join, and was preparing to participate in it, but was not permitted by her school principal to attend. In one case, she was morally compelled to attend an event which she was not interested in, as it was not relevant to her needs:

I have a sad experience of not getting permission to participate in an important professional development training. I was very interested in it and was about to leave for it, but the school principal did not permit me to leave school... Once, I was asked to participate in a primary-level training event, which was not relevant to me, but I had to participate to please the principal. Ke garne (what could I do)! I had no option but to follow the principal. (Sani, interview, April 20, 2022)

The participants' views and experiences suggest that while government-facilitated training programmes offer valuable opportunities for professional development in certain areas, their overall impact remains constrained by several critical limitations. The absence of content tailored specifically to English language teaching in multilingual and resource-limited community school contexts diminishes the relevance and effectiveness of these initiatives. Furthermore, issues of accessibility and institutional support are significant barriers, with some teachers unable to benefit due to a lack of information or administrative restrictions imposed by school leadership. These experiences highlight the urgent need for more context-sensitive, subject-specific training programmes that not only address the unique challenges of English language teaching but also empower women teachers by recognising their professional voices.

School-Managed Events and Resources. Schools have their own internal institutional mechanisms for determining and implementing activities that enhance the academic environment. This section discusses the availability—or lack—of training events and other resources related to teacher professional development. A cross-cutting theme in this discussion is the role of school leadership, particularly that of principals and head teachers. Special attention is given to two key resources that

schools can manage internally, highlighting how leadership decisions directly impact the effectiveness of professional development initiatives.

Training and Learning Opportunities. There are only a few schools that initiate professional development opportunities on their own, as the participant accounts suggest. Among the rare schools is Kalika's, which organises training and learning events once a year. It is generally a two-day training event facilitated by external experts. The event is not necessarily focused on language teaching, but it often includes content relevant to language teachers and others. Kalika describes one such annual training event as follows:

One of the sessions of one of the recent events was on the importance of funny pictures in teaching and learning. Another session was on the use of both hands, which, according to the expert, is necessary to activate both sides of the human brain. The tips and ideas were refreshing. They were doable as well. I use the tips and ideas in my classroom. (Interview, June 13, 2022)

Women-led or women-in-majority schools are reported to have a better enabling environment compared to others. In these schools exists an environment for collaborative learning, such as peer discussion, interpersonal sharing and interaction, even if a formal training event, like the one reported by Kalika, is not available for different reasons. As Binu shares, all teacher colleagues in her school, in which women are in decision-making roles, cooperate and collaborate. They regularly interact with each other, share problems, critique the solutions adopted by their colleagues, learn from each other's experience and apply it in the classroom. This is how Binu explains her experience of interpersonal learning in her school:

The school administration encourages us to meet, discuss, interact and learn from one another. It also facilitates internal workshops among all teachers

occasionally and plans exposure trips. These internal efforts help explore ways to deal with issues and problems, and spark new ideas that can be tailored to meet our needs. (Binu, interview, June 25, 2022)

Rita's school, headed by a woman, has a sound enabling environment. It offers training as well as interpersonal learning and sharing opportunities periodically. The English Department in her school takes the lead in organising learning events among English language teachers on pedagogy as well as problem-solving skills. The Head of the Department is aware of the importance of interpersonal learning and facilitates environments for that to happen. After participating in a training event, the teacher-participant must share the learning with other colleagues. The leadership, the Department Head, in particular, proactively makes sure that such knowledge-sharing happens after each event.

Gyanu, a Vice Principal, shares a more encouraging experience. Not only did she organise a few formal training events, but she was also able to motivate and mobilise support from the administration using her influence as a Vice Principal. It is the responsibility of the leadership to facilitate teacher training by providing financial and other support as necessary, she suggests. Training is necessary to build the competence of teachers, which contributes to an effective teaching and learning environment. Locally organised (school-based) training is more effective than national training attended by teachers from different regions and contexts, she suggests, and adds that school administration should always be ready to invest in such training. If the administration does not invest in training, it should be pressured and persuaded to do so.

Sometimes the administration does not consider it necessary to organise a professional development event. In that case, it should be convinced to do. In

my school, I strongly put my opinion in favour of teachers' requirements when I sense that the administration is not convinced. The principal cannot deny convincing arguments. (Gyanu, interview, June 21, 2022)

However, not all school administrations are amenable to such voices and arguments that underscore the importance of teacher training. According to Kripa, her school leadership is not even aware that a teacher should learn to teach better. Such leadership would not make any efforts to organise or manage professional development opportunities for teachers. Sama shares similar experiences and underlines that school leadership should play a proactive role in building teachers' skills and competence. Unless schools have the leadership that appreciates the needs of teachers and allocates resources to address the needs, teacher professional development and effective teaching cannot be materialised. She explains:

Unfortunately, we have a leadership that does not care for the needs of teachers. It does not create any environment for learning, sharing or training, and allocates no resources for professional development events or processes. Teachers are left on their own, with their work even unappreciated. (Sama, interview, June 13, 2022)

Even when professional development opportunities are available, the distribution is unequal and discriminatory. This is the observation of all respondents, who point to one or the other type of discrimination they have experienced. To one respondent, it is the gap in information sharing among all teachers. To another, it is the discrimination in information sharing in order to benefit a certain category of teachers and deny others the opportunity. Those who benefit from the information and opportunities are predominantly men, who maintain a close connection with male teachers from other schools and training institutions. Often not part of this network of

men, women teachers are the main losers. Uma explains, based on her experience, how this network operates:

In almost all cases, male colleagues receive information about training or other learning-sharing events through their personal contacts and networks, and they participate in these events without informing others. This information is intentionally withheld from women teachers, fearing that women might become as informed and competent as they are. Male teachers often feel insecure when women teachers become capable and confident, and therefore, they are reluctant to share resources with them. (Interview, June 20, 2022)

Binu has experienced dual discrimination, both as a woman and as a migrant teacher. The binary of 'the local' and 'the rest' comes into play in resource sharing, such as participation in training and other administrative support. In her words:

Training opportunities are not shared with migrant teachers like me. I am both a migrant and a woman—hence, doubly disadvantaged. If I were a local woman teacher, perhaps I would be treated differently. However, this does not mean that local women teachers are treated equally or with sympathy. They often do not receive administrative support when they need respite, such as during pregnancy or lactation. (Binu, interview, June 25, 2022)

Mina also has a similar perception of discrimination in information and resource sharing in her school. To her, the discrimination is based on the patriarchal attitude of the school leadership, which assumes that women teachers cannot manage time for learning and professional development and does not think it necessary to provide women with any opportunity. Such experiences, though not universal, point to how systematic discrimination becomes institutionalised within schools.

The participant accounts suggest that, while a few schools—particularly those led by women—offer encouraging examples of collaborative learning and teacher training, these remain exceptions rather than the norm. The majority of participants reported systemic challenges limiting women’s access to professional development. These challenges include a lack of institutional support and discriminatory practices in the sharing of information and resources. Such patterns not only reinforce existing gender hierarchies but also undermine the overall teaching and learning environment.

Unless school leadership becomes more inclusive, aware and proactive, professional development in ELT and other subject areas will continue to be uneven and inequitable, particularly for women and other marginalised groups. Why schools with the capacity to foster inclusive and equitable environments continue to fall short remains a troubling question—one that points to deeper structural and ideological barriers requiring further investigation.

Library and References. That libraries are a symbol of knowledge and, therefore, a contributing factor to teacher professional development is categorically articulated by all respondents. Almost all also mention that their schools have a library. However, no respondent is satisfied with the space or resources available therein.

Sani’s school has a library as a small physical space. It has no relevant resources, and the leadership appears unconcerned about it:

The school administration does not care for the library nor appreciate its usefulness. When a teacher manages some time—which is rarely available—and goes to the library for some reading and recharging, the administration considers it a timepass or merely personal work. For those in leadership, the

library is just a formality, not a place for learning and reflection. (Interview, April 20, 2022)

The lack of resources, common to all schools, is compounded by the absence of a reading culture among teachers, even in schools where leadership may be supportive of it. Almost half of the participants admit that even if resources were available, they would likely not be properly utilised by teachers. Pramila self-critically represents this group of respondents:

We have a library with some basic resources. However, no one uses them. No one even thinks there is a library to be utilised. We have no reading culture. I do not go to the library even when I have some leisure. We should change this habit. (interview, December 12, 2022)

Some participants explain that visiting the library, regardless of the quality of its resources, and spending time there can be refreshing and pleasurable. However, the pressure of work often dissuades them. This tension between the desire for intellectual engagement and the demands of daily responsibilities is echoed by Uma, who explains:

Visiting a library, no matter how small or poorly resourced, is always good for refreshment, a bit of pleasure, and recharging. However, finding time to go to the library is often a challenge. We are already overloaded with work. And when we do get a little free time, correcting students' assignments takes priority. (Interview, June 20, 2022)

Libraries are vibrant collections of knowledge essential for teaching and learning. The English language teachers' conception of libraries as symbols of knowledge and potential catalysts for their professional development is commendable. However, only a few school leaders regard the library as a repository of references

that teachers should regularly consult. For most others, libraries are a token presence—a formality, not a space for learning, reflection or intellectual engagement. Some teachers, like Pramila, also self-critically acknowledge that they have not fully utilised the library, admitting the absence of a reading culture and the need to change this habit. This disconnect between the symbolic value ascribed to libraries and the practical neglect they suffer—both institutionally and individually—reveals a deeper apathy toward creating a professional learning environment.

This neglect particularly hampers English teaching, where access to diverse texts and pedagogical resources is necessary for improving language instruction and learner outcomes. Unless libraries are reimagined as dynamic, integral parts of professional development and teachers are encouraged and supported to build consistent reading practices, their potential to support teacher growth will continue to remain unrealised.

Non-Government Resources. Professional development resources in the non-government sector constitute a useful complement to those in other sectors. More than half of the respondents have benefited from such resources, which include those offered by the British Council and the RELO. However, participation in such events has largely been out of personal contacts and initiation.

Annual conferences organised by NELTA are also reported to have helped participants learn from ELT experiences across different contexts—national, regional and international—share their own insights and establish networks with English teachers from various parts of the world. These conferences are not merely viewed as professional events, but are experienced as meaningful spaces where teachers engage in peer learning, reflect on diverse teaching practices and expand their pedagogical understanding. Peer learning from cross-cultural contexts broadens ELT pedagogical

perspectives and enhances teachers' capacity to adapt innovative language teaching practices to their own classrooms, making such conferences valuable platforms for sustained professional growth in English language teaching.

Anita participated in a series of webinars offered by the British Council and RELO. Among these, the webinars on the use of ICT stood out as particularly impactful. They helped her realise the importance of ICT for teachers and learn how to use it effectively—especially during the coronavirus pandemic, when physical meetings were not possible. Anita elaborates:

The webinars were a self-explored opportunity and among the most relevant for learning both theoretical and practical ideas and skills. Among other skills and ideas, the webinars taught me how to make my classroom more student-centred using different strategies, including online games. (Interview, April 11, 2022)

Sharala attended several online and physical training programmes offered by the British Council. She found these trainings more useful than those offered by government agencies. However, applying the knowledge was challenging—not because the content was irrelevant, but due to her school's lack of “basic facilities and tools, such as the Internet or other equipment, necessary to apply the knowledge gained from the events. It does not motivate me to learn if I cannot apply the learning” (interview, March 13, 2022).

Sani also attended an online training offered by the British Council, which she learned about through a friend. Like Sharala, she reflects that the knowledge gained was not transferable to her school's physical and administrative environment. She explains: “School leadership is indifferent towards learning and change... Students

are not regular and do not have the proficiency required to adapt to new teaching and learning” (Interview, April 20, 2022).

The non-government sector is a valuable repository of professional development opportunities that enrich women English language teachers’ pedagogical knowledge and practices, particularly through platforms like NELTA conferences and British Council webinars. These resources foster peer learning and cross-cultural exchange, offering low-cost yet effective professional development. However, the benefits of these opportunities are constrained by structural limitations, including inadequate school infrastructure, indifferent leadership and inconsistent access. These factors often demotivate women English language teachers from fully engaging, as the perceived relevance or impact of these opportunities on their ELT practice is limited.

Gaps, Challenges and Obstacles

This subsection presents a critical interpretation of the data related to the professional development challenges faced by women English language teachers. The analysis highlights a range of barriers, including the lack of a women-friendly environment both at home and in schools, the absence of enabling school leadership, patriarchal norms embedded in school processes, the absence of a culture of sharing and peer learning, post-marital responsibilities and excessive workload. Importantly, some of these challenges are also intrinsic, as acknowledged by the teachers themselves, and are rooted in their socialisation and upbringing. They, too, are presented as internal constraints that hinder their professional growth.

Lack of Women-Friendly Environment. All the respondents consistently reported that public schools in Nepal lack a women-friendly environment and space. They perceive professional development opportunities as limited in general, and even

more so for women teachers across all subjects, including English. Even when such opportunities do exist, women teachers often have to give up them due to unsupportive institutional cultures within schools.

Kripa, for instance, was offered the position of Principal in her school but had to turn it down because of the additional time and workload it would entail, demands she could not meet in the absence of a supportive system. As she explains: “The offer was one of a kind for me, but I had to deny it. I had a small baby to give my time to ... the school would not provide any childcare support. I had no other option” (interview, April 8, 2022).

Family and society are also often insensitive to the burdens that women teachers and other professional women carry. This lack of support at home frequently forces women teachers to forgo opportunities that could be crucial to their professional development. Sharala’s experience is particularly instructive. She had to give up several training opportunities and abandon her interest in pursuing an MPhil degree. Caring for her two children took priority, as there was no one else to take on that responsibility. She could not even rely on her husband, who was also a schoolteacher:

He used to remain busy and would also not like to engage in domestic work.

When I would request him to do some work, he would complain about it as if he had done it for 15 days. So, I would not turn to him as far as possible, as it would only create tension in the family rather than resolve the problem.

(Interview, March 13, 2022)

Mala also has experience with a family issue affecting her professional event. She was in training, which was both interesting and practically useful. However, she had to leave it incomplete to take care of her mother-in-law, who suddenly fell ill. As

a *buhari* (daughter-in-law), she could not deny the call to return home. When enquired why she did not explore other options, such as persuading her husband to find an alternative, she explains: “You may be a teacher or a professor. But, at home, you are a *buhari* and have to be on call all the time to address the family concerns and expectations as a matter of priority” (Mala, interview, June 7, 2022). Mala’s experience is felt by a majority of participants in different ways, which has affected their pursuit of professional development, especially after marriage.

Mala’s words, and the shared experiences of others, encapsulate a deeper social expectation: that women, particularly daughters-in-law, must prioritise family responsibilities over professional aspirations—regardless of their qualifications or commitments. These accounts illuminate how structural barriers in schools are compounded by gendered expectations at home, creating a dual burden that systematically sidelines women teachers from fully engaging in their professional development. This intersection of institutional and familial constraints is not incidental but deeply embedded in sociocultural norms. It makes women’s professional growth conditional, negotiable, and, at times, non-essential.

Insufficiency of Supportive Leadership. The other factor that influences professional development is the dynamism and orientation of school leadership. A dynamic leader can turn regular meetings, such as the management committee and staff meetings, into learning and reflection events. However, most schools do not have such leadership. As participants recount, teaching learning issues are discussed only in a few schools. In the majority of schools, only management and administrative issues are shared—not even discussed—with teachers for their information. Even when some teaching-learning issues are discussed, as happens in Sama’s school, “the

decisions and agreements are rarely followed up and implemented” (interview, May 5, 2022).

In Pramila’s experience, too, teachers’ needs and concerns rarely surface in school committees or staff meetings, which focus primarily on administrative issues, student attendance, and course completion, with an expectation that all students pass their exams. Sani’s experience is even more concerning:

In staff meetings, women teachers are neither heard nor taken seriously. The voices of male teachers always receive prominence and often become dominant and decisive. Even when we, women teachers, say something important, male administrators and teachers tend to dismiss it with a ‘mahilaharu bhandai garchhan ni’ (they keep talking) attitude. (Sani, interview, March 11, 2022)

Mala explains that the absence of enabling school leadership is the main obstacle to teacher professional development. A dynamic and supportive leader would effectively organise and manage the limited resources available and ensure that teachers benefit equally. However, her school—like most others—lacks such leadership, both in the school management committee and the administration. Arguing that static and purely administrative leadership harms the reputation of schools, she shares her experience: “An SLC teacher leads our school. All he knows is ‘teacher attendance’ and nothing about teacher professional development. What can we expect from such leadership?” (Mala, interview, June 7, 2022).

These accounts collectively highlight that the absence of dynamic, reflective and inclusive leadership not only limits professional development opportunities but also perpetuates a hierarchical and gendered culture in schools. Without a shift toward leadership that values pedagogical dialogue and equitable participation—especially of

women teachers—meaningful professional growth remains difficult to realise, with serious implications for women English language teachers and for the broader field of English Language Teaching.

Patriarchal Influence in School. Almost all respondents reported experiencing unequal power dynamics and gender-based discrimination in their schools, although the forms and intensities of these experiences vary. Such discrimination appears to be more pronounced in schools where male teachers are in the majority, creating an institutional atmosphere in which women often feel undervalued or sidelined.

Kripa, for instance, reflects on the subtle yet persistent ways patriarchy manifests in her workplace. She observes that her male colleagues hesitate to treat their women counterparts as professional equals and often struggle to acknowledge the exemplary performance of female teachers. Her experience points to a deep-seated discomfort with women's success, suggesting that professional recognition is still mediated through patriarchal filters.

Similarly, Anita shares what she perceives as a systemic pattern of gender bias in her school. Recalling a particular incident, she states: "Once I was coordinating an educational project ... I invited male colleagues to join, but they refused. A colleague even asked why I had to coordinate while there were many capable male teachers" (interview, April 11, 2022). Her account evokes a sense of dismay and exclusion. It also reveals how leadership roles taken up by women are often met with resistance or scepticism, rooted not in capability but in the gendered expectations of who should lead.

Sani's account highlights a particularly overt and institutionally sanctioned form of gender discrimination. She had applied for a lower secondary-level teaching

position that was also linked to the role of school headmaster. By topping the written examination, she clearly outperformed all male candidates. However, the all-male selection committee chose not to recommend her for the post. Instead, a male teacher was appointed as headmaster, while Sani was offered the position of vice principal. Reflecting on this experience, she illustrates: “This is the direct effect of patriarchy and an example of the depth of gender discrimination rooted in our institutional culture” (interview, April 20, 2022). The committee’s decision, despite clear evidence of her merit, reveals how leadership is still viewed through a gendered lens, where women’s authority is often seen as unacceptable or illegitimate within traditionally male-dominated institutional hierarchies.

Unlike Kripa, Anita, and Sani—whose experiences reflect more overt and institutional expressions of patriarchy—Pramila points to a more subtle, yet equally telling, form of gendered marginalisation in her school. She draws attention to what she perceives as a consistent disregard for events and occasions that hold particular significance for women, such as *Teej* and *International Women’s Day*. In her words:

...not appreciating women-specific events and occasions, such as Teej and International Women’s Day, is a display of male superiority that is rooted in patriarchy. Such events are socio-culturally and politically important to women ... but patriarchy finds them insignificant, which is discouraging.

(Pramila, interview, March 11, 2022)

Across all accounts, participants converge on the view that patriarchal norms—whether rooted in the family, embedded in social expectations or reinforced by public institutions—serve to limit women’s opportunities for growth and autonomy. Gyanu, for instance, reflects on how patriarchy discourages women from building their capacities, pursuing professional roles, or envisioning independence

beyond domestic responsibilities. Instead, it reinforces conventional gender roles, often confining women to caregiving duties for children, the elderly, and other household obligations.

Mala extends this understanding further, noting that patriarchal domination is not restricted to traditionally conservative families. In her view, it exerts an equally strong influence in so-called liberal households. When it comes to daughters-in-law, she suggests, the expectations are even more rigid and unforgiving: "... a *buhari* should not leave home for work ... stay home under the supervision of in-laws ... to attend to their needs and make them happy all the time" (Mala, interview, June 7, 2022).

The participants' experiences collectively reveal that patriarchy, as an ideology of male superiority, permeates both private and public spheres. Whether in conservative or liberal families, or within school environments, it manifests in ways that marginalise women and constrain their professional growth. Within institutional settings such as schools, this influence often operates covertly—by denying women equal access to leadership roles, undervaluing their contributions and limiting their opportunities for advancement. When women English language teachers are sidelined in this manner, schools not only perpetuate gender inequality but also fail to fully harness the pedagogical and professional strengths these teachers bring. In effect, this compromises the broader goal of excellence in English language teaching.

Limited Sharing and Collegiality. Almost all participants—except one—noted that there is little to no environment or culture for interpersonal sharing and experience-based learning in their schools. Sharala emphasises that experience-sharing can be an effective and low-cost strategy for teacher learning that requires no administrative approval. Yet, as she reflects: "... sharing does not take place. I do not

share and I do not expect others to do so simply because there is no culture and environment for interpersonal sharing” (Sharala, interview, March 13, 2022).

Participants also underscore the value of exposure visits and inter-school exchange as powerful tools for learning. However, only one reported having participated in such exchanges, suggesting that these opportunities are rare. The participants further highlight collegiality as essential to learning through peer feedback, mutual support, and a shared sense of purpose. A collegial atmosphere, they suggest, can foster motivation, companionship, and constructive dialogue. However, except in a few women-led or women-majority schools (discussed earlier), most participants reported an absence of such collegial culture.

Anita recounts a disheartening experience in which collegiality was undermined by gender bias. She suggests that achievements by women teachers are rarely acknowledged—and are sometimes actively dismissed—by male colleagues. Reflecting on this, she shares an incident:

When I presented a certificate of participation in a training event, hoping to get appreciation from the school, my male colleagues unexpectedly mocked it as a fake certificate. If it were a male teacher in my place, I am sure the response would have been different and respectful. (Anita, interview, April 11, 2022)

Sani echoes this sentiment. She attempted to initiate a sharing session in her school, but her male colleagues and the administration showed indifference. In her view, this dismissal was gendered: “Males and male-dominated structures think women are not important persons professionally and do not give attention to our voices” (Sani, interview, April 20, 2022).

Insisting on the importance of collegiality, Gyanu underlines the need for supporting marginalised voices, which are often aimed at addressing systemic issues, which, if left unaddressed, affect the entire educational ecosystem. The role of male teachers and administrators is pivotal in amplifying such voices, which are often of women teachers of all subjects, including English. Gyanu adds, "... an open, trusting, and supportive culture is essential for learning and development, more so in schools whose central function is to produce a critical force for the nation's development" (interview, June 21, 2022).

The participants' experiences suggest that the absence of a supportive and collegial culture—shaped in part by gendered power dynamics and professional rivalry—limits opportunities for shared learning and collective growth. In the absence of interpersonal trust, mutual recognition, and an environment that values every teacher's voice, professional development becomes constrained, and meaningful collaboration remains out of reach. This situation is particularly detrimental to teaching—especially English language teaching—which, as discussed earlier, differs from other subjects in important ways and benefits significantly from shared pedagogical practice and reflection.

Gender-based Upbringing. The belief systems and worldviews encountered during childhood play a foundational role in shaping one's learning orientation and professional development. As participants reveal, discriminatory norms embedded in early socialisation often persist into adulthood, subtly regulating their aspirations and identity. A woman raised to normalise inequality may internalise these beliefs so deeply that, despite her qualifications, she finds it difficult to challenge them. As Sani reflects, "Gender-based discrimination, which all of us are brought up with, remains

so deeply ingrained in our psyches that it prevents us from claiming our space, taking leadership roles, and realising our full potential” (interview, April 20, 2022).

This internalisation is poignantly evident in Sama’s account, which offers a deeper lens into how familial ideologies shape gendered educational trajectories. Her father was opposed to educating his daughters, echoing his own father’s worldview that investing in girls’ education was a waste of resources. He would carry his son (Sama’s brother) on his shoulder to school, while completely ignoring that his daughter was quietly following them. At home, too, Sama was expected to devote all her time to household chores. As she recounts:

I could go to school because of my mother and uncle, who wanted me to study... I would memorise the whole content I read at school, and was often the first girl in my class. Still, my father would not be impressed and would not support me... Such a family attitude and the social tolerance of it are the main obstacles to women’s professional development, as they leave a lifelong impact. (Interview, May 5, 2022)

Sani agrees with Sama that the primary challenge for women teachers stems from their gendered upbringing at home. This upbringing places them in a difficult position as they grow older—a position in which they must constantly negotiate between the ideal woman prescribed by tradition and the professional woman they aspire to become. Although Sani herself did not experience discrimination within her family, she still felt constrained by gendered expectations in public life. Pramila agrees with Sani and adds that this tension intensifies after marriage, when traditional norms become even more rigid and intrusive.

Navigating the conflict between traditional diktats and professional aspirations is far from easy and frequently demands both personal and professional compromises.

In Sani's words: "The tradition wants us to strictly follow its expectations... but we cannot quit our profession and lose our identity. How to deal with these clashing roles is difficult and oftentimes requires compromising professional growth" (interview, April 20, 2022).

Kalika further explains that gendered upbringing renders women psychologically weak and dependent. It instils in them a belief in their subordination to men, reinforces the idea that domestic work is their primary duty, and positions teaching—or any profession—as secondary. A woman who internalises such beliefs often accepts humiliation and discrimination as normal and is less likely to initiate resistance. As Kalika reflects: "I am from a well-to-do family but have not been able to realise my professional goals due to the gendered orientation and expectations with which I grew up. Gendered orientation is damaging to women" (interview, June 13, 2022).

These accounts reveal that gendered upbringing is not merely a private or individual concern. It is a deeply embedded structural condition that disadvantages women from an early age. It encompasses both physical and psychosocial elements that, in combination, create lasting harm. Among its most damaging effects is the cultivation of psychological dependency, which inhibits women from asserting themselves, pursuing leadership roles, or resisting discriminatory treatment. As women internalise these limitations as normal, they become more likely to accept humiliation, denial and exclusion in both their personal and professional lives. This internalisation is then mirrored and reinforced by societal institutions—such as schools—that continue to operate within patriarchal frameworks.

When discrimination becomes normalised not only by society but also by the women themselves, professional stagnation becomes inevitable. In the context of this

study, women English language teachers find their growth restricted not by lack of talent or commitment, but by the enduring weight of gendered socialisation.

Reinforcement of Social Discrimination in Public Institutions. Participant responses suggest that public institutions—particularly schools—practice an institutionalised layer of discrimination against women that is often distinct from, and sometimes more pronounced than, the gender biases experienced within families. The findings indicate that, except for one participant, none reported direct discrimination related to education during their childhood at home. However, all respondents described experiencing various forms of discrimination—sometimes overt, other times subtle—within the school environment. They unanimously observe that such discrimination has had a lasting impact on their personal and professional lives.

During school days, Sama's school had a discriminatory seating arrangement. Boys and girls would be prompted to sit separately, suggesting that boys and girls were different and should not share their sitting. This would bring in boys a sense of superiority, as learned at home in society, and would be expressed in their humiliating attitude towards girls, such as teasing. To Sama, such sitting arrangements and tolerance of boys' behaviour towards girls was the reinforcement of social discrimination in school, which would impact girls' dignity, identity and education. It took her some time to overcome the impact of the discrimination, and many of her friends might still be affected by it.

In Sani's case, the discrimination used to be expressed in role assignments between boys and girls, and teacher reactions to students' questions and curiosities. Floor cleaning and scrubbing used to be done by girls. No boy would be asked to do these jobs. Teachers would even answer student queries and curiosities in a discriminatory manner. Such discrimination has a long-term impact, she stresses. It

would dissuade girls from going to school and demotivate those who would go, like herself, to focus on study and perform better. A girl who cannot perform well as a student cannot develop herself as a good teacher, she suggests.

Anita experienced discrimination even as a teacher in a school in a village where she started her teaching career. After teaching for a year in a school in a village, the management tried to replace her with a male teacher without discussing it with her. They took it for granted that she could not manage her classes effectively because of her small build. Anita recounts: “The administration thought a woman teacher with my build could not control students and deliver quality teaching like a man ... and tried to relieve me” (Anita, interview, April 11, 2022).

Sharala also has the experience of discrimination like that of Anita. After completing her Master’s degree, she applied for a secondary-level position in response to an advertisement. However, the administration did not register her application. They said they needed a male teacher, not a female. “It was a clear example of institutionalised gender discrimination being practised in the school” (interview, March 13, 2022).

Uma never faced discrimination at home, but grew up with her neighbours, who were not positive about her going to school. They would mock and humiliate her. To her surprise, she had to face discrimination in the school. Once, she asked for the principal’s permission to leave school a little early as her child was unwell. The response from the principal shocked her.

The principal’s reply to my request was not only discouraging but extremely dishonourable and misogynistic. No school principal is expected to make such remarks. You know what he said? ‘yo aaimaiharu khali bachcha bhanera chutti bhanchha, tehi bhaera malai aimai teacher chahin raakhnai man

lagdaina' (I hate hiring women teachers as they ask for leave in the name of the child). (Interview, June 20, 2022)

The principal's response is not an isolated case. Other participants have also experienced discriminatory and humiliating remarks from school leaders or male colleagues, such as "you cannot manage time" or "you are not fit for this." These examples constitute discursive violence. More than half of the respondents have directly experienced such gendered forms of exclusion and violence.

Even the school principal is not spared from name-calling and humiliation if she is a woman. As Manvi recounts, her male colleagues in her school find it very hard to adjust their egos, as the school has a woman principal who is committed to creating an inclusive environment. This has "hurt their ego of masculinity," which they express by using such utterances as "*u ta rani ho ni, hamile bhaneko kina manchhe ra* (she is a queen and does not listen to us)" (interview, Manvi, March 2, 2022). As Uma adds, "such a woman-debilitating attitude prevalent in schools reflects the traditional gendered view and stands as a serious obstacle to the professional development of women" (interview, June 20, 2022).

These narratives reveal that public institutions, particularly schools, are not neutral spaces but active sites of gendered power relations. For women English language teachers, the persistence of discursive violence, institutional barriers and symbolic exclusion not only undermines their confidence but also constrains their professional growth and leadership opportunities. While discriminatory practices at home may be diminishing, their reproduction within institutional settings continues to shape these teachers' lived experiences in profound and enduring ways.

Post-Marital Complexities. All but one respondent reported that post-marriage family dynamics posed a major obstacle to women's professional

development. Marriage, they explained, brings inherent obligations and complexities. In many cases, it adds familial and social responsibilities that consume significant time and, in some instances, obstruct women's professional aspirations, particularly when such aspirations are seen by the family as conflicting with tradition or established family values.

Manvi's experience stands as an exception. While she faces the burdens imposed by a patriarchal social order, she has not encountered discrimination within her marital family. Her in-laws have been notably supportive: "I have created a very good relationship with my in-laws ... they all love and support my academic and professional steps" (interview, March 2, 2022).

For the remaining participants, this ease was absent. Mala observed that few families support a *buhari* in pursuing her aspirations, not even husbands. Anita added that at no stage in life does a woman escape domination or discrimination, whether direct or indirect. After marriage, these challenges become more complex. A woman loses decision-making power even over her own life. Her choices become limited, her responsibilities multiply, and her priorities shift. Anita explains:

The care of children and their needs becomes the first priority of a woman after marriage. The care of family members and tradition becomes second. Professional development comes only thereafter. It literally means there is no time left for a married woman to focus on her profession. (Interview, April 11, 2022)

Embedded in Anita's account is an unspoken sacrifice: she was selected for a six-week Teacher Effectiveness Enhancement Programme (TEEP) in the UK but gave up the opportunity when her son became unwell, aware that the opportunity would not come again. Similarly, Sani forfeited a two-day residential scout training because her

otherwise supportive husband was unsure he could care for their mildly ill son in her absence. "This moment illustrates how entrenched gender expectations around caregiving can derail women's professional aspirations, even when familial support exists in principle.

Kripa emphasised that joint families exacerbate these challenges. The larger the household, the harder it is for a woman to balance domestic and professional demands: "They have hundreds of things lined up for a buhari to do. There remains no time for her to think of and participate in events related to her profession" (interview, April 8, 2022). Kalika added that these visible and invisible barriers, including psychological and physical strains, significantly hinder women's professional growth. She highlighted the role of caste and ethnicity as additional constraints, sharing her own experience:

I come from a guest-welcoming Newar community. Making guests feel comfortable is our main task, not a professional job. My family, including my husband, feels they have everything and I should not work ... 'teaching ta baahun chhetri po garchha ta, timile garne ho?' (Teaching is for Brahmins and Chhetris, not for you). (Interview, June 13, 2022).

Gyanu echoed Kalika's sentiment. While living in a joint family, even reporting to school on time was a struggle. Her illiterate in-laws assigned her overwhelming household duties, and her husband—a military officer—refused to intervene on her behalf. "The pressure was so great that I had to return to my maternal home when my husband would be away. Things improved only after separation from the in-laws" (interview, June 21, 2022).

Sharala noted that the challenge is not simply dividing time between domestic and professional responsibilities. A deeper issue lies in fulfilling ever-changing and

often conflicting expectations of in-laws, which rarely align with a daughter-in-law's professional ambitions.

These narratives reveal that post-marital family structures, especially in joint households, continue to be a critical barrier to the professional development of women English language teachers. While biological responsibilities like motherhood may be anticipated and planned for, the unpredictable expectations of in-laws and the passive stance of husbands reinforce gendered hierarchies within the household. Unless familial attitudes shift toward a more liberal and supportive orientation—with husbands adopting active, enabling roles—women's full participation and advancement in professional life, including in the field of English language teaching, will continue to be constrained.

Excessive Workload. Beyond familial and societal constraints, institutional demands within schools—particularly excessive workload—pose significant challenges to women teachers' professional growth. Several respondents identified the daily workload in schools as a significant barrier to professional learning, updating and knowledge renewal.

As Sani shares, teachers are overburdened with responsibilities, leaving them little to no time to engage in new learning or implement innovative ideas in their classrooms. The primary focus remains on completing the syllabus and preparing students for examinations. According to her, school administrations place overwhelming emphasis on student pass rates—often with little regard for how those outcomes are achieved—while paying minimal attention to teachers' professional needs or well-being. Ironically, this neglect undermines the very quality of teaching and learning outcomes that such institutions claim to prioritise.

While Binu describes her school environment as comparatively better—as it allows some space for interpersonal learning and peer sharing—she also points out that it remains unfriendly toward women teachers. Their concerns are often ignored, even when valid:

We do not get any respite even during pregnancy or when caring for a small child. There is no administrative willingness to acknowledge such issues and offer support. The school leadership does not consider them to be issues that even require attention. (Interview, June 25, 2022)

Gyanu and Mala echo the concern raised by Binu. Not only does the administrative pressure they face leave no room for personal or professional growth, but they have also never experienced any recognition for their hard work or acknowledgement of the specific challenges faced by women.

The respondents do not claim that work overload affects only women. Rather, they highlight that school leadership fails to appreciate the unique challenges that women teachers face, particularly those related to maternity, childcare, and gendered expectations at home, which affect the workplace. This lack of recognition intensifies the burden for women teachers and undermines their opportunities for professional growth

A recurring theme across these narratives is that excessive workload, compounded by gender-insensitive leadership, creates a constraining environment for women English language teachers. Without institutional recognition of—and responsiveness to—their specific needs and circumstances, meaningful professional development will remain out of reach. This, in turn, risks undermining the overall quality and effectiveness of English language teaching, particularly the valuable contributions made by women teachers.

Initiatives Against Challenges and Obstacles

Women English language teachers have not merely been passive observers or recipients of the gendered barriers affecting their professional aspirations. As this subsection explores, they have actively undertaken a range of initiatives to address the systemic challenges they face. Their narratives, presented below, testify that—despite formidable odds—they have continued to meet their professional responsibilities while creatively negotiating the dual roles of homemaker and educator. The pervasive force of patriarchy has not diminished their resolve or resilience. Rather, it has compelled them to develop inventive strategies to counter its various manifestations. In doing so, they have gradually built their capabilities and agency through self-initiated, self-directed, and self-managed efforts.

Self-Participation in Learning Events. More than half of the respondents reported participating in training and learning events organised by non-governmental institutions such as NELTA, the British Council, and the Regional English Language Office of the U.S. Embassy. For example, Anita engaged in a series of webinars that helped her enhance her ICT-related knowledge and skills. Similarly, Sharala attended a British Council-facilitated event that strengthened her understanding of teaching pedagogy. However, she was unable to apply the knowledge gained due to the lack of necessary equipment and the limited competency level of her students.

These accounts reflect the participants' proactive engagement in professional development, despite limited institutional support. Their efforts illustrate a strong sense of agency and a commitment to self-driven learning, even when structural conditions hinder practical application.

Navigating Professional Growth via Online Tools. Online resources are another major tool the respondents have made use of to enhance and refresh their

knowledge and skills. For Anita and Sani, online resources have been an effective learning tool. “Social media, including Facebook, enhances our knowledge in various ways. I use them and also encourage other colleagues to use them” (interview, April 20, 2022).

To Uma, the resources available on the Internet are very helpful in updating a teacher about recent ELT developments and refreshing one’s knowledge. She often turns to Google and YouTube to consult new materials. Every English teacher, both male and female, should consult online materials in their free time, she suggests, giving a clear and persuasive reason: “Online resources are the best means to test and challenge our knowledge and learn new ideas and skills at the same time” (Uma, interview, June 20, 2022).

Online interaction with experts, trainers and peers can also be an easy and effective learning tool, Binu adds, presenting her experience of her engagement with NELTA. She is connected to a messenger group created by NELTA members in which they share ideas as well as problems, and invite experts and trainers to help solve the problems when necessary. The messenger group brings together Binu’s colleagues from different regions and districts. In addition to learning and sharing, it also enhances professional solidarity and companionship among them, she suggests. “Messenger is a very effective tool for peer learning and collective problem solving” (Binu, interview, June 25, 2022).

These accounts and experiences illustrate how the participants actively engage with digital platforms to construct knowledge and sustain professional connections. They reveal that online resources are not merely tools for acquiring information, but also spaces of agency, collaboration and solidarity, where learning unfolds through both technological access and social interaction.

Balancing Domestic Responsibilities and Professional Life. According to Manvi, a professional woman should be creative enough to strike a balance between the domestic chores imposed on her by tradition and the requirements of the profession of her choice. It is not easy, she underscores, but doable and manageable. Anita complements Manvi by echoing her words that maintaining such a balance is within the power of a woman teacher. It takes time for patriarchal worldviews to change, Anita suggests and adds that a woman professional cannot wait for infinity to develop herself:

It is difficult, it is disgusting ... but this is the choice we have as women professionals ... To say that we have no time to focus on our profession is to give in to the ideology of patriarchy that women cannot handle professional responsibility. (Anita, interview, April 11 2022)

Mala also suggests that without the skills to strike a balance between what the family expects and where women want to go professionally, they risk failing on both fronts. Kalika, Uma, and Gyanu also echoed similar views.

In this regard, Gyanu has an illustrative story to share. She went to her maternal home when her in-laws did not support her professional work, especially during her husband's military deployment. After her husband's retirement, they separated from the in-laws, and she returned. However, she faced another challenge—taking care of two children while continuing her teaching job. As she explains:

I had no option but to compromise. 'Koseli, paisa ke diera hunchha, mainle uhanharulai phakaen ... uhanharule bachchha herna sahayog garnu bhayo' (I won them over by giving gifts or money ... they too helped me take care of kids). A professional woman should have the skills to manage both responsibilities. (Gyanu, interview, June 21, 2022)

Balancing domestic responsibilities and professional life is not simply a matter of time management, but a continuous negotiation of self-worth, resistance and resilience. For the women English language teachers, such a balance is a deliberate and creative act of agency, where navigating patriarchal expectations becomes integral to sustaining their identity as professionals.

Interpersonal Sharing, Exposure and Collegiality. Interpersonal sharing and collegiality emerge as important strategies that some respondents rely on to navigate professional challenges. However, such supportive environments are reported to exist in only a few schools. Rita's school is one of these, where an atmosphere of open discussion and collective problem-solving among English and other teachers is actively fostered, often facilitated by the Head of the English Department. Rita explains: "We have a sharing culture, which helps us learn as well as find solutions ... After we attend any training, it is mandatory to share the learning with all staff in the school" (interview, Nov 13, 2022).

Uma had an opportunity to visit another school and observe how they teach. It has left a terrific impact on her. In a classroom she visited, she found quotes of important personalities pasted on the walls. Inspired by it, she collected the quotes that could be relevant to teaching and pasted them on the walls of her classrooms as teaching materials. "It was an inspiring learning, which I have been able to apply immediately" (Uma, interview, June 20, 2022). Uma also highlights the good camaraderie and collegiality present in her school environment.

Binu and Kalika also explain that their school environment is encouraging. Both administrative and academic colleagues help one another, appreciate the work of the other and constructively suggest areas of improvement if such areas are noticed.

“This may be because we have women in leadership positions,” says Binu (interview, June 25, 2022).

All the respondents who have spoken of the environment of collegiality and interpersonal learning repeatedly flag that the environment exists because of women being in leadership positions. Triangulation across respondents suggests that it is not just an exaggeration. Women leaders have created a healthy teaching-learning environment within the limitations they have.

These experiences demonstrate that collegiality and interpersonal sharing are vital sources of professional support and growth, especially within constrained environments. Importantly, women’s leadership emerges as a transformative force, cultivating a collaborative culture that both enhances learning and challenges traditional hierarchies in schools—a dynamic essential not only for the professional development of women English language teachers but also for advancing English language teaching.

Measures Necessary to Deal with Gaps and Challenges

This subsection explores how women English language teachers envision meaningful and sustainable responses to the gaps they face—an understanding shaped by their lived experiences of negotiating everyday professional challenges. Their reflections reveal that strong family support, deep self-belief, ongoing personal struggle, a culture of shared responsibility both at home and within schools and proactive, empathetic leadership are essential conditions for transforming their professional landscape. For them, such conditions represent more than practical necessities, as they are deeply interwoven with their sense of self, purpose, and professional becoming. The future, they suggest, holds striking possibilities—realising them will require both individual resolve and collective commitment.

Family Support. Almost all respondents underscore the importance of family support in enabling professional women to succeed in their careers. According to Kripa, such support empowers a woman like her to develop the confidence and capacity to take on challenges and deal with them effectively. Binu shares that she was inspired to become a teacher by her sister and, later, received further encouragement from her in-laws after marriage. In Rita’s case, it was the constant support from both her parents and husband that proved crucial: “Without the family support, I would not be the English language teacher I am today” (interview, March 27, 2022).

Sharala’s story is particularly striking in this regard. After passing the lower secondary-level teacher examination, she received an appointment in a remote village in the Tanahun District—a post that would require her to leave behind her four-year-old daughter and family. The decision was difficult, but her parents made it easier. As she recalls:

They motivated me not to give up the opportunity by assuring me that they would take care of my daughter. If I did not have their support and assurance then, I would not have pursued the teaching career. Everything would stop there. (Sharala, interview, March 13, 2022)

Kalika and Uma also highlight the critical role of family in shaping women’s professional journeys. However, they point out that some family structures—especially joint families or those following Newari traditions—can act as obstacles. Kalika observes that many middle-class Newar families discourage women, particularly daughters-in-law, from engaging in professions outside the home, fearing it may harm the family’s prestige and values.

These accounts suggest that family support is pivotal in shaping a woman's professional direction and determining her success. Observations of the respondents' experience indicate that how a woman fares in her profession often depends on how her family responds to her aspirations. A supportive family not only softens the impact of social, cultural and biological barriers but also affirms a woman's sense of worth, agency and professional identity. For many women English language teachers, family support has not just been a resource—it has been experienced as a vital source of validation that empowers them to navigate structural constraints and pursue their goals with confidence and purpose.

Self-Confidence and Continuous Struggle. All the respondents underline self-confidence and the courage to stand up against discrimination as essential to addressing the difficulties women face in the workplace. If those affected are not prepared to change the situation, no change will happen, they suggest. Kripa, for example, insists that a woman English language teacher should enhance her confidence that she can deliver, and struggle in each step of her professional ladder despite the family, society and social institutions standing in the way. Once a woman takes up and successfully deals with a challenging job, then nothing becomes difficult. As Kripa explains:

Once, I was asked to serve as the superintendent of a School Leaving Certificate (SLC) centre in Khotang. The role was challenging. But I accepted it and smoothly delivered despite several threats. Then on, I do not think there is anything I cannot do. (Interview, April 9, 2022)

Binu agrees with Kripa's spirit. Professional women should not leave any space for society to doubt that women are unable or incapable of handling professional responsibility, she says. "Women should take the challenge to disprove

such a social attitude by building confidence as well as leadership ability” (interview, June 25, 2022).

Manvi and Mina also insist on the importance of the power, self-courage and confidence to speak against discrimination while delivering on the responsibility assigned. Sama agrees and shares her childhood struggle just to go to school, which her father was opposed. Anita adds that it is the self-confidence—the ‘I-can-do confidence’—that enabled her to complete her MEd while teaching in a remote village of Makawanpur, which she took up just after completing BEd. In her words:

After BEd, I started teaching in the village, walking six hours a day up and the same time down, while also pursuing an MEd. It was extremely difficult to balance these two tasks. I failed some subjects in examinations, but did not give up. I always felt I should keep trying. The perseverance finally handed me success. (Interview, April 11, 2022)

Mala is more forceful in her insistence on the struggle. She suggests women professionals should fight both internally and externally. Internally, they should break their mentality of an ‘ideal woman’ that they are socialised to be. Externally, they should fight to get the professional space and opportunity to grow. The fight should, however, include rational arguments and determination to succeed professionally, she insists.

We have to say ‘no’ to undue social and familial pressure and claim our right to succeed in the profession of our choice. Once, when my mother-in-law was unwell, my husband wanted me to quit my job to take care of her. But I asked him, ‘Why don’t you quit? She’s your mother, not mine.’ He didn’t say anything after that. We cannot be both the ideal woman and the professional woman at the same time. (Mala, interview, June 7, 2022)

According to Gyanu, it is a woman's right to decide what profession to adopt. Once the decision is made, she should fight to pursue it all along, she adds: "The fight requires strong willpower, determination and resolve" (interview, June 21, 2022).

These narratives illuminate how self-confidence and continuous struggle are not merely traits or strategies, but deeply lived experiences through which women English language teachers assert their agency within a patriarchal society. Their stories reflect a gradual yet resolute claiming of professional space on the basis of a strong sense of 'self,' which is sharpened by years of navigating personal, familial and institutional barriers. The act of standing up—whether against societal doubt, discriminatory norms or internalised ideals of womanhood—is experienced as transformative. Through these struggles, women English language teachers not only overcome obstacles but also reconfigure the very meaning of what it is to be a professional woman within the context of English language teaching.

Burden Sharing. Most of the respondents underline the need for burden-sharing for professional women to be successful in their profession. Burden-sharing should happen both at home and in schools. Sharala argues that family members should be reoriented to help women professionals in household work and allow them to focus on professional development activities. If a professional woman gets the time a man gets at home, there is nothing she cannot do in her profession, she insists. Sani agrees with Sharala and highlights that in-laws should change their attitude to enable professional *buhari* to do better in their profession. How the professor of change should unravel should be the concern of society as a whole, she suggests.

In Gyanu's experience, the preordained women-only roles identified by patriarchal society take much of a professional woman's time and attention. Unless

this burden is redistributed, a professional woman cannot focus on her professional growth. She further explains:

Unless male family members share domestic responsibilities, and both the family and society accept men supporting their wives and sisters, women continue to face challenges in focusing on their professional development. For a woman to truly thrive in her profession, a shift in familial attitudes is essential. (Gyanu, interview, June 21, 2022)

Uma argues that schools should also share the burden carried by women teachers. This, she suggests, can take the form of mutual problem-sharing among colleagues, which not only helps reduce individual stress but also allows teachers to explore solutions through peer support and suggestions. Sama presents an even more compelling reason: “We should share our academic as well as domestic burden with colleagues ... to find a solution and also relieve the psychological burden that it creates” (Sama, interview, May 5, 2022).

Taken together, these perspectives reveal that burden-sharing—both at home and in the workplace—is not a matter of courtesy but a structural necessity for women’s professional advancement. Without a conscious redistribution of domestic and institutional responsibilities, the full potential of women English language teachers remains constrained. A shift in mindset, roles and support systems is crucial to ensure that professional growth is not a solitary struggle but a collective commitment of all concerned.

Proactive School Leadership. While personal motivation and peer support play a role in teacher development, respondents overwhelmingly agree that proactive and gender-sensitive school leadership is the decisive factor in shaping meaningful professional opportunities, particularly for women English language teachers.

Almost all respondents suggest that proactive leadership is necessary to support the professional development of all teachers, all the more so for women teachers, given the disadvantages they have to deal with. All expect the leadership to organise teacher training and facilitate peer discussion, interpersonal sharing and networking with schools and teachers in other contexts.

Anita suggests that school leadership should take the initiative to institutionalise teacher training and refresher courses to effectively address the current gaps and challenges in professional development. In the absence of such activities, the professional growth of all teachers will be hindered. However, as Anita explains, “... the effect of it will be worse on women who are already overburdened with gendered roles, which often stand in their way of professional development” (Anita, interview, April 10, 2022).

To Sani, proactive leadership is a must as regards English language teaching, which is different from other subjects in many respects, as “it needs special equipment, lab, materials and skills which only an informed and proactive leadership can appreciate and provide for” (interview, April 20, 2022).

Gyanu insists that school leadership should create an enabling environment for everyone to feel emotionally secure and equally treated. In addition, schools should be women-friendly, and no form of patriarchy should be reflected in the school environment. She also adds that the school leadership should be appreciative of the special needs of women, such as pregnancy, which requires moral support. In this regard, her experience is discouraging.

When I was pregnant and needed moral support from school, I did not get any. The administration instead put various kinds of pressure on me. I had to go through a

difficult time. These things have a bearing on professional development. (Gyanu, interview, June 21, 2022).

These experiences and the internalised meanings of the participants clearly indicate that school leadership cannot remain passive or indifferent to the differentiated needs of women teachers. Proactive leadership must go beyond administrative duties to actively foster a culture of care, equity and professional growth. From institutionalising training to addressing gendered challenges sensitively, the responsibility lies with leadership to create an environment where every teacher, especially women English language teachers, can thrive.

Reflection on the Self and Profession

How women English language teachers perceive, interpret and explain professional development is closely tied to how they view—and have experienced—the teaching profession as a whole. This section presents their self-assessment of the profession, offering insights into their inner sense of ownership, motivation and commitment.

All respondents expressed general satisfaction with the profession, albeit with minor reservations, and a shared desire to contribute as effectively as possible. For Sharala, teaching brings personal fulfilment because it allows her to simultaneously serve two roles: to remain close to her family and manage household responsibilities while also contributing to society as a teacher.

Teaching is similarly satisfying for Binu. Like Sharala, she values her ability to serve the community. Despite the challenges inherent in the teaching profession, her identity as an English language teacher brings a strong sense of pride. As Binu reflects:

I find that English teachers receive more respect than others, even in a patriarchal society. This feeling is both rewarding and empowering, and it reflects that women English language teachers hold the power not only to produce good students but also to change societal mindsets. (Interview, June 25, 2022)

Mala, too, has no regrets about being a teacher, though it was not her original plan. She had aspired to complete a Master's degree in economics and pursue a related career. However, after marriage, she left her studies as per the expectations of her in-laws and husband. Still, she finds meaning and satisfaction in her role as an English language teacher. She finds particular joy in mentoring students—especially girls—who feel more comfortable speaking with female teachers and administrators.

Likewise, Uma's satisfaction stems from a specific passion: learning. For her, being an English language teacher means staying informed, continuously learning, and helping students navigate their questions and challenges. As she puts it: "Teaching has given me both pride and satisfaction" (interview, June 20, 2022).

Kalika, however, is not as content, not because she dislikes teaching, but due to the attitudes of the government and society. She expresses frustration at the disparity between how teachers and civil servants are treated. In her view, the teaching profession is not held in high regard, particularly by the middle class. This societal and institutional disregard diminishes her professional satisfaction.

Gyanu, on the other hand, finds joy in balancing her roles as a teacher and a homemaker. However, she voices concern that this dual contribution often goes unrecognised: "Society as well as the school system do not appreciate the double role we women teachers are performing" (interview, June 21, 2022).

Pramila also expresses general satisfaction, though she admits that the work can sometimes become monotonous. Like Gyanu, she questions why women continue to face barriers to pursuing and sustaining a professional career of their choice. Uma echoes this sentiment, saying she cannot recall any situation where being a woman prevented her from managing her responsibilities or making a meaningful impact.

Despite the persistent challenges, some respondents observed a gradual shift in societal attitudes. Sani, for instance, noted a reduction in gender discrimination over the years. Reflecting on her school days, she recalled how girls were routinely assigned cleaning tasks while boys were exempt. Today, she feels that such discriminatory practices have diminished: "... today, there is no this level of discrimination" (interview, April 20, 2022).

Uma has also noticed positive change within her family. Her in-laws, once resistant to women's participation in public roles, have become more supportive. She highlights how even her husband's attitude has transformed: "My in-laws are not what they used to be in the past. They are supportive... my husband is also changed. He makes food for the family... and tiffin for me" (interview, June 20, 2022). Such small changes, they suggest, can have significant and lasting impacts.

Overall, the participant accounts reveal that despite enduring structural and social barriers, women English language teachers find pride and fulfilment in their roles. Their satisfaction is rooted in the opportunity to serve both their families and the broader community. Some derive strength from increasing social recognition, while others are encouraged by the slow but visible shift in societal perceptions. Yet, two prominent concerns persist: the lack of a genuinely supportive family environment and the continued undervaluation of teachers compared to civil servants.

These ongoing issues underscore the broader context within which professional development must be understood and addressed.

Chapter Summary

This chapter analyses data organised around the research questions and is divided into six sections. The first five correspond to the main themes, each aligned with one of the five research questions, while the final section presents respondents' reflections on the teaching profession.

The first theme explores respondents' understanding of professional development, described as a continuous learning process occurring in both formal and informal settings. They emphasise the importance of interpersonal sharing, reflection, and self-directed learning. Unlearning ingrained habits and patriarchal assumptions is seen as essential for professional growth, as these factors can undermine women's motivation and acceptance as equals. Thus, professional development should extend beyond pedagogical skills to include building constructive relationships with students.

The second theme examines the resources available for professional development, identifying three types: government-facilitated programmes (attended by nearly half of the participants), school-managed resources (characterised by limited training opportunities and underutilised libraries), and non-governmental opportunities (more responsive but less accessible due to poor information sharing). Overall, resource distribution is uneven and inequitable.

The third theme addresses gaps and challenges to professional development, highlighting the absence of women-friendly environments both in schools and families. The lack of childcare facilities particularly affects breastfeeding mothers, while family insensitivity to the challenges faced by professional women diminishes their motivation and focus. Additionally, inadequate school leadership fails to meet

teachers' needs, perpetuating low collegiality and limiting opportunities for peer feedback.

The fourth theme outlines the limited initiatives women English language teachers have taken to address these challenges, such as participating in self-selected training and utilising online resources. However, excessive workloads and an unsupportive school environment hinder these efforts. A key initiative is balancing domestic responsibilities alongside professional duties, which is crucial for their development.

The fifth theme presents suggestions from women English language teachers for overcoming these challenges, including the importance of family support through shared responsibilities, building self-confidence to confront discrimination, and advocating for an inclusive, women-friendly school environment. The chapter concludes with respondents' recommendations for improving the professional development landscape nationally, emphasising the need for systemic changes to create a more supportive and equitable environment for women teachers.

Chapter Five

Discussion of Findings

This chapter discusses the findings of the study in response to the main research questions by triangulating primary data, the researcher's insights and the literature review. Drawing on a hermeneutic lens, it interprets participants' responses not as isolated voices but as meaning-making processes shaped by their lived experiences and sociocultural contexts. The discussion critically juxtaposes these accounts with existing research and theoretical frameworks to enhance a contextualised understanding of the issues at hand. In doing so, it reveals patterns and themes that illuminate the dynamics of women English language teachers' professional development and its wider contribution to English language teaching. This sets the stage for the concluding chapter, which synthesises the findings and outlines the contribution of the study to current knowledge.

The discussion is guided by the thematic structure derived from the main research questions, focusing on five key areas, which serve as the main themes of discussion: (1) knowledge and experiences; (2) resources and opportunities; (3) gaps, challenges, and obstacles; (4) initiatives to address these challenges; and (5) suggestions for improving the professional development of women English language teachers. Each theme, along with its associated sub-themes, is analysed through the dual lens of the theoretical framework of the study and relevant literature. This approach is adopted to ensure that the discussion remains both theoretically informed and situated within a broader academic context, and offers a comprehensive understanding of the core issues.

Knowledge and Experience

This section explores women English language teachers' understandings of professional development alongside their lived experiences. Their perspectives show how knowledge and practice are interconnected with professional growth. Key elements that shape professional development include learning and unlearning, empathy, relational skills, interpersonal reflection, well-being, and motivation. Each of these elements is discussed below to highlight its role in addressing challenges within English language teaching.

Unlearning for Learning. The professional development of women English language teachers in Nepal is best understood as a dynamic process that involves not only learning new ideas but also unlearning entrenched norms. This process of “unlearning for learning” is especially crucial in a patriarchy-influenced socio-cultural context, where prescribed behaviours often undermine women's potential, contributions and agency (Gupta et al., 2023; Johnson, 2005). Some participants shared that they gave up training and leadership opportunities due to fear of domestic pressure, but later realised this was not a good decision. They might have decided differently if they had been confident in their ability to overcome these pressures, which would have required unlearning the belief that domestic issues were difficult to manage.

This process of unlearning extends beyond women teachers themselves. It also requires their male colleagues and administrators to confront ingrained worldviews and promote inclusive leadership. In education systems historically shaped by patriarchal values, these beliefs have disturbed women's intellectual advancement and encouraged rigidity among men (Cochran-Smith, 2003). In this study, such rigidity

surfaced in some male teachers' resistance to women-led initiatives or reluctance to offer leadership roles to female colleagues.

The participants' experiences show that while teacher learning begins with formal university training, it must be sustained through continuous professional engagement. Depending on the context, this may include either theoretical foundations or hands-on strategies. In all cases, professional development is shaped by the broader social, cultural and political realities that determine educational needs (McCarthy, 2016; Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

The data reveal that the actual needs of women English language teachers—rather than what is available—should drive professional learning. When professional development is disconnected from classroom realities and student learning outcomes, it risks becoming irrelevant and uninspiring. Several participants expressed frustration with training sessions that failed to address their specific challenges or teaching contexts. Educational researchers affirm that effective professional learning must go beyond generic training and directly support teachers in refining their instructional approaches. Such alignment is key to bridging the gap between professional growth and visible improvements in student engagement and achievement (Dhanavel, 2022; Osman & Warner, 2020; Zeng, 2023).

However, the effectiveness of such development is often obstructed by internalised behaviours formed during early childhood, such as gossiping, avoidance of opportunities, complacency and a deeply ingrained belief that women cannot lead. As Berk (2018) and Decoteau (2016) argue, these early-formed habits affect both women and men, shaping their perceptions of what is possible or permissible in adulthood. Many women English language teachers in this study recognised these

patterns as limiting. Some of them even regretted that they gave up leadership or training opportunities due to familial obligations and self-doubt.

These ingrained beliefs operate as invisible barriers. Instead of encouraging adaptability and innovation, they reinforce outdated thinking, which limits possibilities for pedagogical progress (Kunnath, 2023). Without the skills to question these assumptions, it is difficult for teachers to adopt new practices that meet the needs of classrooms and students (Avalos, 2011; Cochran-Smith, 2003). This was clearly reflected in the accounts of the participants of the study.

Some participants shared experiences of their opinions being dismissed or their participation in decision-making being excluded. These practices reflect and reinforce a culture of epistemic injustice and cognitive rigidity. As McGuigan and Kern (2016) point out, clinging to outdated habits limits the capacity to evolve in any profession. In education, unlearning outdated habits is necessary to build equitable and empowering environments for all teachers. This view resonates throughout the participants' narratives.

The study identifies two childhood-formed habits that require unlearning. The first is the tendency toward gossip and finding excuses to avoid learning opportunities. It is found among both English and non-English women teachers and is often expressed through a dismissive attitude toward professional engagement. The second is a pattern, particularly among male teachers and administrators, of minimising women's leadership, ideas and initiatives. Both behaviours significantly undermine professional development: gossip fuels mistrust and disengagement, while minimising denies women professional recognition and devalues their contributions. If left unaddressed, these tendencies not only obstruct the growth of women English language teachers but also erode the collaborative culture essential for meaningful

teaching and learning, especially English language teaching, where such collegiality is vital.

Unlearning, in this light, emerges not as an optional add-on but as a foundational condition for transformative professional development of women English language teachers.

Building Bonds with Students. The respondents are clear in their view that teacher professional development should not be restricted to pedagogy alone. Limiting it solely within the boundaries of subject knowledge and teaching strategies offers a narrow and fragmented understanding of its scope. Instead, professional development must include relational skills and attitudes that help teachers to build meaningful connections with students and support them in ways that reform the traditional classroom.

Establishing such connections requires foundational knowledge of child psychology, stress management and effective communication. It also requires skills to apply these competencies in daily teaching practices. Almost half of the participants emphasised that this relational dimension is essential to making classroom environments trustworthy, caring and mutually respectful. Their reflections resonate with the widely accepted conception of teaching as both a ‘science’ and an ‘art’ (Weisman, 2012). While the ‘science’ relates to pedagogical mastery and subject competence, the ‘art’ involves the capacity to relate to students and translate abstract knowledge into meaningful, personalised learning experiences.

As Avalos (2011) notes, professional development is not limited to enhancing technical competence but must also enable teachers to transform knowledge in a manner that facilitates student growth. Participants in this study highlighted that such transformation is rooted in empathy, emotional sensitivity and the ability to relate to

diverse student experiences. From their perspective, professional learning that fails to incorporate this relational aspect risks undermining a critical aspect of effective teaching. When teachers form strong interpersonal bonds with students, they build environments where students feel seen, supported and motivated to engage.

A growing body of research confirms the power of positive teacher-student relationships to shape socio-emotional well-being, heighten student confidence, stimulate curiosity and improve academic outcomes (Cristine et al., 2019; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Luo et al., 2022; Rimm-Kaufman, 2015). In contrast, conflictual or indifferent relationships tend to inhibit student engagement and achievement (Husby et al., 2023; Rimm-Kaufman, 2015). This contrast is clearly reflected in the participants' lived classroom experiences.

While both men and women teachers must develop relational competencies to engage students meaningfully, participants emphasised that these capacities are particularly critical for women teachers. Girls, especially, are more likely to approach women teachers for academic and emotional support. It is due to patriarchal socialisation that discourages women and girls from sharing their feelings with authority male figures (Tharakan & Tharakan, 1975). In male-preferred societies, where female students often receive less attention and encouragement, women teachers can play a vital role in offering mentorship and emotional support.

To fulfil this role meaningfully, women teachers need professional training that helps them systematise and enhance their caregiving and mentorship capacities. As UNESCO (2000) suggests, professionalising these skills is not only essential for student well-being but also for promoting girls' enrolment and retention in schools.

However, the women English language teachers engaged in this study unanimously suggest that current professional development programmes fail to

support this dimension of teaching and call for their updates to include relational and care-oriented components. This is necessary to align formal teacher learning with the realities of classroom life and such nuanced needs of students. Only then, they suggest, can English language teaching become effective.

In light of participants' reflections, building bonds with students stands out not as an optional quality, but as a cornerstone of effective teaching. Seen through a feminist lens (Crenshaw, 1991), these relational skills express the agency of women English language teachers. It enables them to lead with empathy, care and an understanding of context. From the perspective of capability theory (Nussbaum, 2011), these are not just soft skills, but essential human abilities that help both teachers and students grow in learning spaces that value gender sensitivity and social justice. To fulfil the deeper promise of education—especially in English language teaching—teacher professional development must be rethought to recognise, support and give value to these often-overlooked aspects of teaching. Doing so not only strengthens teachers' professional identity but also supports their role as change agents within school settings shaped by complex gender norms.

Peer Interaction and Reflection. Interpersonal interaction and reflection among peers consistently emerge as key components of meaningful professional development. These processes help consolidate collective knowledge through shared experiences and provide practical support in addressing classroom challenges. Being logistically simple and cost-effective, reflective peer learning can fill the gaps left by formal training programmes, which are often expensive, irregular and require cumbersome administrative approval.

Reflective learning enables teachers to draw insights from personal, interpersonal and contextual experiences and allows them to rethink and replan their

teaching for both individual and collective benefit (Ryan & Ryan, 2013). It entails looking ahead while making sense of past experiences, within an environment that is equal and open, where participants are internally motivated to learn and share equally (Leung, 2009). This process not only supports collaborative exploration of pedagogical ideas but also builds a collegial and nurturing teaching atmosphere in schools (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Reflective analysis further helps teachers identify areas for improvement and engage in the simultaneous acts of learning and unlearning (McLeod et al., 2020).

While the study reaffirms the value of reflective peer learning, it also reveals a significant gap in practice. Except in a few schools, such reflection and sharing are rarely institutionalised as regular and structured activities. This shortfall stands in stark contrast to participants' expectations, who believe that reflective learning should be an ongoing practice accessible to all staff and embedded within the academic calendar. These gaps also diverge from educational theory and policy recommendations (Crandall & Finn, 2014; Richards & Farrell, 2005), which advocate for institutionalised opportunities to reflect on teaching practice and professional growth.

Notably, the study finds that women-led schools—or schools where women are in the majority of the teaching workforce—tend to be more open and receptive to professional development. These schools, even without substantial external inputs, often create what can be described as a passively enabling environment, where the importance of teacher development is neither dismissed nor obstructed. This aligns with earlier research indicating that women-led schools are often better managed and more inclusive in their academic and administrative practices (Bergmann et al., 2022; Bhandari, 2019; Lee et al., 2019; Pant, 2024; UNESCO, 2019).

Taken together, these insights affirm that peer interaction and reflective learning are not just useful tools but essential processes for the meaningful development of teachers engaged in English language teaching, especially in resource-constrained settings. Yet, their potential remains underutilised due to the lack of formal structures and institutional commitment across most schools. Women-led schools, however, stand out for fostering environments where reflection and collaboration are more likely to flourish, even without significant systemic support. As argued in feminist and capability frameworks (Crenshaw, 1991; Nussbaum, 2011), such school cultures reflect the critical role of women's leadership in shaping inclusive, caring and collegial professional spaces where learning is a shared responsibility.

Investing in the development of women English language teachers is therefore not only about improving individual practice, but also about nurturing their capacity to become transformative leaders—capable of embedding reflection, peer support and gender equity into the fabric of everyday school life.

Teacher Well-being. Teacher well-being is a crucial element of professional development. It fosters teachers' professional dignity, social identity as valued educators and institutional support. It also prepares them for what Darvin and Norton (2023) theorise as 'investment' in professional development—a concept central to sociocultural theory. However, as participant accounts reveal, current teacher professional development programmes often overlook well-being as a fundamental element.

Well-being and motivation are closely interlinked. Well-being generates motivation, and motivation drives active engagement in professional growth. McCallum et al. (2017) highlight that well-being is pivotal in sustaining motivation

and interest in skill enhancement, making it indispensable to professional development. External support, even when intended to be transformative or enabling, cannot replace the need for intrinsic motivation. Addressing well-being is, therefore, crucial. Not only does it relieve stress and burnout, but it also fosters “positive patterns of thinking and feeling,” which ultimately enhance teachers’ professional and personal lives (Cook et al., 2017, p. 15). For women English language teachers who work in a stressful environment, addressing well-being concerns becomes a prerequisite—not only for their overall empowerment and resilience but also for improving the quality and effectiveness of English language teaching, which relies heavily on sustained motivation, creativity and emotional engagement.

The insights by Matiz et al. (2020) are valuable in this context. They demonstrate that psychological stress affects women teachers disproportionately compared to their male counterparts. Their research underscores the efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions, such as stress management training, in alleviating stress and promoting well-being. These findings resonate with this study’s observations, which call for embedding teacher well-being and motivation into professional development frameworks at both policy and operational levels.

At the policy level, creating an enabling and respectful school environment that addresses the specific needs of women teachers—such as pregnancy and childcare—is crucial. Currently, no schools covered by the study provide such conditions. At the operational level, well-being must be integrated into professional development processes as a non-negotiable component. Existing resources and practices do not reflect this priority.

Respondents caution that neglecting teacher well-being risks reducing teaching, particularly English language teaching, to a monotonous routine performed

merely for financial survival. This approach, they argue, fails to deliver meaningful outcomes. Alarming, school administrators—who are responsible for addressing these issues—often lack awareness of the concept of teacher well-being. This underscores the urgent need to educate school leaders about their critical role in promoting teacher well-being, especially for women English language teachers, and their contribution to educational outcomes.

The overarching insight emerging from these findings is that teacher well-being must be recognised as a core element of professional development by all actors in the educational ecosystem. When well-being is supported, women English language teachers are more likely to invest in their growth, exercise agency and sustain the motivation necessary for effective English language teaching—an argument central to both socio-cultural theory and feminist perspectives (Crenshaw, 1991; Darvin & Norton, 2023).

Acknowledging well-being as central to professional development nurtures a culture of care and resilience that benefits not only individual teachers but the entire school community. Yet, as this study reveals, well-being remains conspicuously absent from current professional development policies and practices. The women teachers engaged in this research consistently emphasise that unless well-being is placed at the heart of TPD design and delivery—both in policy and practice—professional development will continue to fall short of addressing the everyday realities and needs of women teachers, including women English language teachers.

PD Resources and Opportunities

This subsection examines teacher professional development resources and opportunities that women English language teachers are aware of and have made use

of. It also explores their assessment of the supply and quality of available resources and identifies factors that facilitate or hinder their access to these resources.

While professional development is widely acknowledged as essential to teaching quality, access to meaningful and sustained opportunities remains uneven. For women English language teachers in particular, the resource landscape is shaped by both structural exclusion and internalised limitations. This has resulted in underutilised potential and persistent inequity.

Promising Yet Inadequate. The primary government resource for teacher professional development is a training programme delivered in two phases, with the first for 30 days and the second for 10 to 15 days. This training includes conceptual presentations and project work on topics such as curriculum, lesson planning and evaluation. However, it is not specifically designed for English language teaching.

While accessible to all community school teachers, the impact of the training is mixed. A key limitation—frequently raised by participants—is that the programme is not regularly updated to reflect the evolving needs and contextual realities of teachers. Another is that it does not address the specific needs of English language teachers.

Skill-based components, such as the use of ICT and strategies for student motivation, are generally reported to be more relevant than other conceptual contents. The ICT component directly addressed teachers' immediate classroom challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic and proved practically relevant. Similarly, training on student motivation helped teachers enhance student engagement. However, many other components were considered irrelevant. They have been borrowed from foreign contexts that fail to align with Nepal's specific classroom dynamics.

According to participant accounts, professional development resources offered by non-governmental actors—such as the British Council, the American Embassy and NELTA—tend to be more practical, current and responsive to the needs of English language teachers. Yet, access to these resources is limited and often influenced by personal networks in which men are perceived to hold greater influence, reinforcing existing gender hierarchies. Moreover, participation in such programmes typically requires school-level approval, which many women English language teachers report as a barrier, even when they are aware of opportunities.

Meaningful teacher development requires more than isolated training sessions. It involves the ability to identify learning needs, address weaknesses and build on existing strengths (Fenici, 2021). Crucially, this development must be linked not only to personal growth but also to effective classroom delivery and student outcomes. As Hill and Papay (2022) argue, professional development must not only support teachers but also hold them accountable for results. Germuth (2018) reinforces this by calling for a shift away from conventional workshops toward approaches that integrate practical application with accountability measures. Without these, TPD risks remaining theoretical, outdated and disconnected from practice, an issue echoed by the participants of this study.

In sum, while certain elements of existing TPD, particularly skill-based components, show promise, the broader framework remains outdated and poorly aligned with teachers' actual needs. This misalignment deters women English language teachers from investing in it, as it offers no tangible outcome. This is an issue that socio-cultural theorists like Darwin and Norton (2023) link to the disconnect between institutional support and teacher identity, motivation and investment. As touched on

above, non-governmental initiatives offer more relevant alternatives but are hampered by limited supply and issues of access, particularly for women.

Future professional development must therefore be practical, updated and context-specific. It should also embed accountability and address structural barriers that limit equitable access and impact, barriers that, as capability theorists argue (Nussbaum, 2011), restrict individuals from functioning and flourishing in their professional roles.

Resource-Scarce Libraries. Libraries symbolise knowledge and serve as repositories of resources that promote learning, creativity, imagination and intellectual growth. They are foundational to the development of an informed and enlightened society. They offer spaces where individuals can engage with diverse ideas, challenge dominant narratives and cultivate critical thinking. Within schools, libraries are expected to function as hubs of continuous learning—not only for students, but for teachers as well. Libraries enable them to reflect on pedagogical practices, deepen subject knowledge and explore innovative solutions to instructional challenges.

Respondents in this study unanimously acknowledged the importance of libraries, noting that most schools have a designated library space. However, as one participant aptly observed, these spaces are not envisioned “as a symbol of knowledge” but rather as “small physical spaces” marked by a library signboard. The majority of these libraries do not have the resources to fulfil their intended role. Most have outdated, insufficient and professionally irrelevant materials. This inadequacy is especially stark in relation to resources that could support teachers’ ongoing professional development. From a socio-cultural perspective (Darvin & Norton, 2023), this lack of material support disconnects teachers from key learning tools that could enhance their professional identity and pedagogical investment.

The value of libraries extends well beyond the needs of teachers. They play a pivotal role in supporting students' academic and personal development by fostering problem-solving and critical thinking, which are essential for lifelong learning and adaptability (Patel & Anitha, 2022). Beyond academics, libraries also contribute to student well-being by providing a quiet, inclusive space for reading, self-reflection and peer interaction (Merga, 2021; Willis et al., 2019).

The School Library Manifesto of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2021) envisions libraries as shared platforms for knowledge exchange. The platforms are not only envisioned for teachers and students but also for parents and the wider community. Yet, the findings from this study reveal that no existing libraries fulfil these multifaceted roles. As a result, teachers and students rarely engage with these spaces. The involvement of parents or community members in them is virtually non-existent.

This situation points to a deeper structural failure—one that limits both the capabilities and agency of teachers and students. From a capability approach perspective (Nussbaum, 2011), the absence of well-resourced libraries is a denial of an essential function of education: the freedom to access meaningful knowledge, to imagine alternatives and to grow intellectually and professionally. These capabilities are particularly critical for effective English language teaching, which depends on access to various textual resources as well as opportunities and intellectual space to develop communicative competence. The absence of libraries also suggests a systemic undervaluing of the role libraries play in cultivating human development.

There is, therefore, an urgent need for systemic reform and imaginative intervention. Policymakers and educational leaders must re-envision libraries as dynamic and inclusive knowledge hubs that respond to the diverse needs of teachers

and students, while also offering the potential to engage parents and the wider community. One promising avenue is the development of e-libraries, which can overcome physical space constraints and provide access to a wide array of up-to-date, relevant and context-sensitive resources. Many high-quality materials are freely available. For the materials that require subscriptions, necessary budgets should be allocated to promote equitable access. As the women English language teachers in this study unanimously affirmed, meaningful professional learning and student development are contingent on access to intellectually enabling environments—an idea supported by the capability approach, which emphasises expanding real opportunities for individuals to learn, grow and flourish (Nussbaum, 2011).

Uneven Distribution of Opportunities. As previously discussed, opportunities for teacher professional development remain both scarce and unevenly distributed. Most schools neither offer nor actively generate resources to support teachers' professional growth. A small minority organise one or two annual workshops, usually focused on refreshing conceptual knowledge or integrating ICT into classroom practices. While useful, these isolated events have a limited impact and do not benefit the majority of teachers.

More significantly, women English language teachers perceive that available opportunities disproportionately benefit male teachers, who use their social and professional networks to learn about development initiatives, particularly those offered by non-governmental organisations, and secure permission to participate. In contrast, women English language teachers often lack access to such networks and information, partly due to their focus on domestic responsibilities after professional duties. Even when they are aware of these opportunities, they face additional hurdles

in obtaining clearance, as decision-making is controlled by male-dominated school hierarchies, as is often the case noted by Sales (1999) in other patriarchal contexts.

This dynamic reflects what feminist scholars describe as the informal rules of patriarchy, unwritten norms that work alongside formal structures to uphold male privilege and curtail women's agency (Anyangwe & Mahtani, 2023; Ortner, 2022). The dominance of men in leadership roles further entrenches these gendered power dynamics to normalise male preference in decision-making. Even in relatively liberal school environments, the numerical dominance of male staff creates competition that marginalises women and restricts their access to the limited professional development opportunities available (Johnson, 2005).

Addressing this imbalance requires more than logistical responses. As participants suggest, it calls for structural reform led by gender-responsive leadership, one explicitly committed to gender equity and rights-based empowerment of women teachers. Such leadership takes intentional steps to ensure women teachers' participation in decision-making processes about equitable resource distribution for teacher professional development. These shifts were evident only in schools with women-dominated leadership, which remains the exception.

Importantly, closing these gender gaps is not merely a matter of fairness but a pedagogical necessity. Research shows that empowering women teachers enhances student engagement, strengthens teacher-student relationships and improves overall learning outcomes (Coristine et al., 2019; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Luo et al., 2022; Rimm-Kaufman, 2015). From the perspective of the capability approach, unless women teachers have the genuine freedom—the capabilities—to access and benefit from professional learning, their functioning as educators remains constrained (Nussbaum, 2011). Failing to address these systemic inequities not only reproduces

gender injustice but also limits schools' potential to deliver high-quality, transformative education—particularly in English language teaching, where women teachers are uniquely positioned to foster inclusive, communicative and student-centred learning environments.

Indifferent Authorities. Issues related to teacher professional development, as well as broader concerns affecting teachers, are conspicuously absent from School Management Committee (SMC) meetings. None of the respondents could point to concrete decisions made in these forums, as teachers are largely excluded from meaningful participation. They are neither heard nor listened to. Moreover, there is no observable link between committee resolutions and improvements in academic processes or outcomes. This reveals a glaring disconnect between school leadership and the educational or pedagogical needs of women English language teachers.

Envisaged as community-based governance bodies, SMCs are mandated to foster participatory governance by ensuring active involvement of parents, teachers and community stakeholders in the planning, implementation and monitoring of educational development activities (Puri & Chhetri, 2024). As such, they are positioned as vital institutional mechanisms for creating an enabling environment conducive to inclusive and high-quality education (OECD, 2009). They should, ideally, play a pivotal role in ensuring equitable access to professional resources and support for all teachers. Yet, in the context of community schools, SMCs appear to fall far short of this potential. If these committees had effectively exercised their governance authority, the respondents would likely have witnessed tangible improvements in the academic environment, including subject-specific areas such as English language teaching, where professional input and pedagogical support are especially critical.

The findings reinforce Bhattarai's (2022) assertion that SMCs consistently underperform, particularly in relation to policy deliberation and strategic oversight. One major impediment is the politicisation of SMCs, which dilutes their capacity to function as impartial governance bodies (Rai, 2016; The Kathmandu Post, 2022). The lack of technical capacity and leadership skills further limits the ability of SMCs to advance inclusive educational governance. Regardless of the root causes, what remains evident is their failure to create a responsive academic climate that supports teacher development (OECD, 2009), which they are empowered to do.

While the principle of community-based school management remains sound—rooted in the idea of local empowerment and responsiveness—its practical implementation often diverges from its empowering vision. The stark gap between normative expectations and lived realities calls for a fundamental reimagining of SMCs: their authority must be clarified, their operations depoliticised and their leadership capacity significantly strengthened. Only then can SMCs begin to fulfil their transformative promise and contribute meaningfully to teacher development and educational improvement, particularly in domains like English language teaching that require sustained pedagogical investment and inclusive planning.

Untapped Resources. In a striking finding, the women English language teachers openly acknowledged internal challenges, most notably, a sense of complacency and habitual resignation within themselves. These attitudes are evident in the frequent rationalisations used to avoid engaging with online resources, many of which are freely available, pedagogically relevant and specifically designed for educators. Given that most of these materials are in English, they are readily accessible to English language teachers. Yet, they remain significantly underutilised, which is a missed opportunity for self-directed professional development.

While all participants are aware of these resources and recognise their potential to compensate for the lack of formal training, only a few actively engage with them. The reasons cited for this include domestic responsibilities, heavy school workloads and a general lack of motivation. These challenges are common and disproportionately burden women, both physically and psychologically, in all patriarchal settings (Mesman & Groeneveld, 2017; Van Oosten et al., 2017). However, some participants pointed to a deeper obstacle: the absence of a reading culture, which limits engagement with both theoretical and practical materials. While they are partly valid, such explanations often hide internalised barriers—what Jiwani (2009) calls symbolic violence—where women internalise societal narratives that present them as too occupied or ill-equipped to undertake professional growth.

This internalisation leads to the giving up of professional opportunities that are well within reach. Although these teachers are fully aware of the value that online resources offer, such as opportunities to improve pedagogical practices and keep abreast of new educational trends (Guzder, 2019; Meador, 2018), they have largely failed to capitalise on them. The underlying sense of being overburdened and unsupported by school administrations contributes to this disengagement. These conditions are not simply circumstantial. They reflect deeper discursive violence perpetuated by patriarchal norms, which suppress the development of women's agency and reinforce passivity.

To resist these intersecting constraints, women English language teachers must not only recognise the professional value of available resources but also proactively integrate them into their development. This entails cultivating resilience and building agency (Kabeer, 1994)—the capacity to make strategic choices and decisions and act upon them—while critically engaging with the intersectionality of overlapping

barriers (Crenshaw, 1991). It also involves reimagining these opportunities as investments in strengthening their professional identity and enhancing their social standing (Darvin & Norton, 2023).

Unless women English language teachers actively confront the norms and practices that sustain their marginalisation, they will continue to be excluded from meaningful professional progress—an exclusion that ultimately undermines the quality of English language teaching itself. Harnessing the potential of digital tools and resisting symbolic narratives that obstruct their progress are essential first steps toward transformative change.

Gaps, Challenges and Obstacles

This sub-section presents findings on the professional development challenges faced by women English language teachers, highlighting both structural and cultural barriers. Key gaps include the absence of a women-friendly environment in schools, a lack of collegiality among teachers, excessive workload and the enduring influence of gendered parenting. These challenges intersect in complex ways. They affect all actors in the school system. However, the effect of them on women English language teachers are harsher. They limit their opportunities for growth, leadership, and agency.

Absence of a Women-Friendly Environment. The study reveals that the key obstacle to the professional development of women English language teachers is the absence of a supportive environment—both at home and in schools—that appreciates and recognises their value and contributions. Within the family, the environment is often unsupportive of women taking on public roles such as teaching. After marriage, engaging in a public role proves even more challenging.

In many cases, in-laws do not value the professional engagement of their daughters-in-law. Even when direct objections are absent, indirect resistance—such as refusing to share domestic responsibilities—undermines their professional pursuits. For instance, one woman English teacher from a middle-class Newar family frequently faced questions from her in-laws about why she should work as a teacher. According to them, teaching conflicted with family traditions, which dictated that ‘buharis’ (daughters-in-law) should stay at home, welcome guests and rely on family income. Husbands, even if sympathetic, rarely challenge such norms and often align with their parents’ expectations. This reality echoes Johnson’s (2005) observation that the entrenched influence of patriarchy discourages even liberal-minded men from defying the traditional hierarchy of gender roles established by family and society.

This dynamic places an additional burden on women, who must navigate their professional aspirations carefully to prevent their ambitions from becoming a source of familial discord and conflict. In such situations, women English language teachers often feel compelled to subordinate their professional goals to preserve harmony within the household. The fear of sparking conflict has led many respondents to refrain from prioritising their careers, reflecting the pervasive and deeply rooted constraints that hinder women’s professional development.

The study documents instances where women English language teachers gave up professional development opportunities, including overseas training, due to a lack of family support. For example, one teacher declined such an opportunity as there was no assurance her children would be cared for in her absence. Another teacher rejected a leadership position because the additional workload was unmanageable alongside her domestic responsibilities. These accounts echo earlier findings that the absence of a supportive culture is a significant barrier to the professional success of women

(Lieberman, 1994, cited in Villegas-Reimers, 2003; Sultan et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2001). As almost half of the participants suggest, balancing social and family obligations with professional responsibilities is the only way to go forward. In the balancing act, however, they are often compelled to forgo their professional priorities and aspirations. This inevitably impacts the quality and continuity of English language teaching, which relies heavily on sustained engagement with evolving pedagogical practices and communicative approaches.

Similarly, the school environment remains discouraging for women teachers, often reflecting deeply ingrained patriarchal norms. A few participants highlighted how male colleagues' 'superiority complex' not only undermined the professional contributions of women teachers but also created an unmotivating and unsupportive work atmosphere. This sense of superiority often manifests in dismissive attitudes, unequal recognition or limited opportunities for women teachers to assert themselves, which ultimately hinders their ability to be professionally successful and contribute meaningfully to the school community.

The denial of women-specific events, such as International Women's Day and 'Teej,' by the school administration is also an indication of a women-unfriendly environment, as a respondent underlined. In a more direct case, a woman English language teacher was denied a leadership position because it was perceived as a male role. These experiences underscore that despite decades of social and political transformations, gender justice advocacy and women's empowerment efforts, the school system remains under the influence of patriarchy in which only men are considered effective for leadership (Saini, 2023; Walby, 1990). These are also a clear example of how patriarchy operates intersectionally, entangling sociocultural institutions such as families and schools (Crenshaw, 1991; Ortner, 2023).

The above accounts are also emblematic of patriarchy institutionalising "symbolic and discursive violence" (Jiwani, 2009), manifesting as hierarchical gender roles at home, male-dominated school systems and societal discourses that praise male superiority in leadership and public roles. These patriarchal narratives instil complacency in women professionals, discourage them from challenging traditional roles and weaken their efforts to build the agency needed for systemic change.

The lived realities presented here expose the dual burden of symbolic and structural violence that women English language teachers endure daily, within both familial and institutional settings. These intersecting constraints are not isolated, but systematically reinforced through patriarchal ideologies that shape expectations, limit opportunities and silence resistance. Addressing such deeply embedded injustice demands more than policy adjustments. It requires a radical reimagining of what professional development means for women.

Schools must not only provide enabling environments but also actively dismantle the patriarchal assumptions embedded in their cultures, practices and leadership norms. Regular monitoring, gender-sensitive evaluations and structural reforms must be institutionalised to ensure schools become genuinely empowering. If professional development of women English language teachers is to become truly inclusive and transformative, schools must stop functioning as sites that legitimise and reproduce gender inequality.

Limited Scope for Collegiality and Reflective Learning: All women English language teachers emphasise collegiality as a critical component of their professional development. They view it as a means to foster a collaborative and supportive environment that enables the sharing of knowledge, experiences and best practices in a structural and accessible manner. Unlike formal training programmes,

which often require significant resources and institutional support, collegiality is a cost-effective and practical alternative for professional growth. However, despite its potential benefits, such collaborative practices are largely absent in Nepal's public schools due to systemic and cultural barriers.

Women-led or women-majority schools provide a more conducive environment for women teachers to engage in discussions about teaching and learning issues, as well as to offer mutual support. Unfortunately, such schools are limited. In other schools, male teachers—whether senior or junior—often show a reluctance to collaborate with their women colleagues. This reluctance is frequently rooted in a perceived sense of superiority, which discourages male teachers from seeking or offering assistance. As a woman teacher observed, this dynamic is often driven by a fear of exposing gaps in their own knowledge, which are further compounded by patriarchal norms and deeply ingrained social hierarchies. These factors collectively hinder the development of a collaborative culture, which deprives women teachers of the support necessary for their professional growth.

The benefits of collegiality are well documented in the literature. Collegiality creates an environment where colleagues collaboratively address challenges in a spirit of trust, openness and mutual appreciation (Kee & Luan, 1996; Lieberman, 1994). Senior teachers, in particular, play a crucial role in providing guidance and support (Harris & Anthony, 2001). Furthermore, collegiality has been shown to enhance student learning outcomes and organisational effectiveness within schools (Shah, 2012). Despite these advantages, Nepal's public schools have largely failed to harness the potential of collegiality, primarily due to a lack of awareness among school leadership about its importance. This neglect has direct consequences for the quality of English language teaching, which thrives in environments where collaborative and

reflective practices are in place. This oversight represents a significant missed opportunity to make use of in-house resources for professional development.

Reflective learning—closely linked to collegiality as another vital tool for teacher professional development—is also limited in Nepal’s public schools. Reflective learning enables teachers to critically analyse their personal and collective experiences, both positive and negative and to adapt their practices based on contextual insights (McLeod et al., 2020; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Ryan, 2013). Women English language teachers unanimously acknowledge the value of reflective learning, citing its cost-effectiveness and practical applicability. They also consider it effective in enhancing teaching methods and classroom practices, which ultimately contribute to educational improvement. This observation is consistent with the findings of educational researchers (Dhanavel, 2022; Ovens & Fletcher, 2014). However, reflective learning remains underutilised. Where it does occur, it is often ad hoc and fails to address teachers’ specific needs. Participants in this study attribute this gap to the absence of a structured culture of review, reflection and peer learning.

The absence of a sharing culture is sustained by complex interpersonal dynamics, where some male teachers exhibit a superiority complex while many women teachers internalise a sense of inadequacy due to the combination of patriarchal influence and the lack of women teachers’ agency. Male teachers often assume they already have all the knowledge needed for their roles and dismiss the need for further learning or collaboration. In contrast, women teachers—shaped by an inferiority complex—may hesitate to initiate discussions or share experiences, fearing the exposure of their perceived shortcomings. This dynamic is further aggravated by the lack of a supportive environment that fails to recognise women teachers’ contributions and denies them opportunities for growth and collaboration.

Even self-study, a key component of reflective learning, is not universally adopted by women English language teachers. While most participants acknowledge its value, approximately one-third report being unable to allocate time for it. Those who engage in self-study describe it as a powerful tool for professional development, as it enables them to reflect on their practices, challenge assumptions and explore new pedagogical approaches. This view resonates with broader findings in the literature on the importance of self-study in professional development (Mukeredzi, 2015; Schulte & Walker-Gibbs, 2016). This process of self-reflection, self-challenge and self-critique is essential for continuous improvement. However, institutional support and time constraints limit the extent to which women English language teachers can benefit from this practice.

The findings underscore the critical role of dynamic and engaged leadership in fostering a culture of collegiality and reflective learning. School leaders who understand the fundamentals of teacher professional development and its broader impact on educational outcomes can make a significant difference by utilising available resources. Unfortunately, such leadership is conspicuously absent in Nepal's public schools, leaving teachers—especially women English language teachers—without the guidance and support necessary to cultivate a collaborative and reflective professional environment. At the same time, women English language teachers must also assert themselves, rise above the restrictive environment and demonstrate the kind of pedagogical and professional leadership that can drive transformative change both in their own careers as well as in the broader field of English language teaching.

Excessive Workload. The study identifies excessive workload in schools as a significant barrier to the professional development of women English language teachers. This burden manifests in both direct and indirect ways. Directly, it stems

from administrative pressures to complete the course, prepare students for examinations and ensure high pass rates—often at the expense of quality education. Indirectly, it includes the ongoing responsibilities of classroom teaching and student assessment. These cumulative demands leave little to no space for teachers to refresh their knowledge, engage in reflective practices and participate in professional learning activities.

Teacher workload is a well-documented global challenge to professional growth and pedagogical innovation (Jerrim & Sims, 2021; Ofsted, 2023; Sellen, 2016). Research consistently shows that excessive workload undermines teacher motivation, increases work-related stress and adversely affects the quality of teaching and learning (Jerrim & Sims, 2021). It also disrupts work-life balance and feeds into broader systemic challenges within the profession (Cooper Gibson Report, 2018), including the indifference toward available professional development opportunities, as documented in this study.

Workload is closely tied to teacher well-being, a foundational element of educational success. As McCallum et al. (2017) argue, the future of education depends on the well-being of teachers. For women English language teachers in Nepal, the absence of well-being safeguards intensifies gender-based vulnerabilities. These teachers often work in high-stress environments where their specific needs are overlooked. Administrative indifference to moral support or burden-sharing—even during pregnancy or child-care emergencies—exemplifies this neglect. One teacher, for instance, recounted how her request for early leave due to her child's illness was dismissed as a pretence by the school principal, subjecting her to psychological humiliation.

Such disregard is not confined to the school environment but intersects with broader societal and cultural inequities. Excessive workload thus emerges not only as an academic obstacle but also as a well-being crisis. While workload affects all teachers, its consequences for women are disproportionately severe—both psychologically and physically, as they are already burdened by structural inequalities. Workload not only creates extra burdens but also harms their well-being and, as a result, reduces the quality of English language teaching.

Addressing this issue demands a recognition of its multifaceted and gendered nature. Workload must be seen not only as a logistical challenge but as a matter of equity and care. Systemic reforms are required to reduce workload pressures, promote supportive administrative practices and prioritise the well-being of women teachers. In the spirit of feminism and the capability approach, only such reforms can create an enabling environment in which women English language teachers can thrive—professionally, emotionally and intellectually.

Gendered Parenting. The study identifies gendered parenting—or gender-based upbringing, as sociologists term it (Mesman & Groeneveld, 2017)—as a significant barrier to the professional development of women English language teachers. Two interrelated manifestations of this upbringing—‘defeatism’ and ‘complacency’—emerge prominently among participants. Both are rooted in a childhood habitus shaped by gendered parenting, which implicitly or explicitly prescribes distinct roles and behaviours for girls and boys during formative years (Mesman & Groeneveld, 2017).

More than half of the participants reported a belief that their efforts to enhance skills in English language teaching would not lead to recognition or promotion into leadership roles. This defeatist mindset, an outcome of epistemic injustice (Kidd et al.,

2017), discourages them from pursuing professional growth, as their knowledge and competencies are undervalued precisely because they are women. This is further shaped by symbolic violence rooted in patriarchy—the implicit cultural messages that render women unfit for leadership.

The roots of such injustice trace back to socialisation within classical Hindu traditions, where girls are taught to uphold family honour through humility and obedience, while boys are groomed for leadership and protective roles (Tharakan & Tharakan, 1975; Wadley, 1977). Mane (1991) argues that such early conditioning instils passivity and a sense of inferiority in women, making it appear natural for them to perceive leadership as beyond their reach.

Similarly, nearly half of the participants expressed struggles with societal expectations of the ‘ideal woman,’ which is often at odds with their professional aspirations in English language teaching. This tension compels them to prioritise familial obligations over professional opportunities. For instance, one teacher refrained from joining an excursion due to family disapproval, while another declined international training because of childcare responsibilities. Rather than seeking alternatives, these women internalised the belief that an ‘ideal’ woman must not inconvenience her family.

Studies show that gendered parenting—both overt and subtle—continues to shape families across both conservative and liberal households despite broader cultural and political changes (MacPhee & Prendergast, 2019; Morawska, 2020). This form of parenting nurtures a resigned psychology, whereby individuals raised in patriarchal and morally restrictive environments internalise limitations, accept them as normal and refrain from questioning or striving toward their potential (Smart Richman & Leary, 2009). Such dynamics are clearly evident in the Nepali context,

where entrenched social norms continue to marginalise women in professional and leadership domains, as reaffirmed by the accounts of the participants of this study.

Participants echoed these lived realities in diverse ways. One teacher observed that gender-based discrimination is so deeply embedded in the collective psyche that envisioning women in roles beyond the domestic sphere remains an uphill struggle. Another expressed concern that such socialisation not only constrains women today but also jeopardises future generations, as young girls are likely to inherit the same restrictive legacies. These reflections underscore how the enduring impact of gendered parenting in Nepal continues to suppress women professionals' aspirations, reinforce systemic inequities and hinder their ability to build the agency needed to reclaim their rightful space.

The findings reveal the far-reaching consequences of gendered parenting and call for systemic action. A critical starting point can be to revisit formal education through curricula and textbooks that actively challenge patriarchal values and promote gender justice. Such interventions—starting from early childhood—can help dismantle inherited limitations and pave the way for more equitable futures. For those women teachers already affected, professional development frameworks in English language teaching should incorporate strategies to address and navigate the effects of gendered upbringing, providing, at the very least, a transitional remedy.

Mitigation of Challenges and Obstacles

This section examines the strategies women English language teachers employ to navigate the challenges to their professional development. Two key measures emerge—self-study and the ability to balance domestic and professional responsibilities—from their accounts and experiences.

Self-study. The study identifies self-study as the primary tool women English language teachers have utilised to address challenges obstructing their professional development. Self-study encompasses two main resources: participation in training workshops initiated personally and the study of online materials. As one participant emphasised, without self-study, there would be no means to resolve confusion or acquire the additional knowledge required for teaching English. Echoing this sentiment, nearly half of the respondents assert that neglecting self-study risks making them outdated, as no alternative support systems are available. This observation aligns with Adrian Underhill's assertion over three decades ago that a teacher who does not engage in continuous learning risks "getting into a rut" (Underhill, 1988, cited in Gnawali, 2008).

However, as previously noted, self-study is not universally accessible. Nearly half of the women English language teachers report significant difficulties in allocating time for professional development. Like many professional women worldwide, women teachers often juggle work, family and other responsibilities. Yet, this reality should not serve as an excuse to curtail their opportunities for growth, particularly in English language teaching, a domain that not only enhances pedagogical capacity but also contributes to women's social prestige and professional identity in South Asia (Erling, 2014). Additionally, such justifications not only perpetuate forms of epistemic injustice (Nash, 2020) but also reinforce cognitive and institutional rigidity that enables male counterparts to dominate professional spaces without confronting the systemic gender inequities at play (Connell, 2009).

Teacher professional development literature recognises self-study as a systematic process of reflection at individual, collective and institutional levels to update and refresh one's knowledge, as well as to address gaps in school

administration and management (Kitchen et al., 2020; OECD, 2009; Ovens & Fletcher, 2014; Schulte & Walker-Gibbs, 2016). Korthagen and Lunenberg (2004) even suggest that self-study should not only be limited to individual problem-solving but should contribute to educational reform. However, the respondents in this study do not appear to hold such a broad view of self-study. They resort to it primarily when other professional development opportunities are unavailable. This suggests that women English language teachers may not be fully aware of the value of self-study or, as one participant self-critically noted, they may not feel the need to engage in it at all. This is concerning, as all teachers—whether of English or other subjects—are expected to stay updated on the latest developments in learning theories and pedagogies.

A few participants reported participating in training events offered by non-government institutions, such as the British Council, RELO and NELTA. One participant also mentioned engaging in online discussions with colleagues and peers. However, the number of teachers utilising such resources remains limited, highlighting a visible gap in the exploitation of readily available professional development opportunities.

Collective reflection, a key component of self-study, is also notably limited. This is attributed to the absence of an enabling environment characterised by a lack of collegiality among peers, insufficient mentoring by senior staff and inadequate support from school administrations. These factors are essential for meaningful collective reflection and the implementation of the insights gained (Harris & Anthony, 2001; Kee & Luan, 1996; Leiberman, 1994). Without such support, even motivated teachers struggle to translate self-study into actionable improvements in their practice.

Balancing Domestic and Professional Responsibilities. Many women English language teachers report being significantly affected by domestic pressures, which have adversely impacted their professional growth. However, nearly half of the respondents emphasised that family obligations—unlikely to change in the near future—should not be used as an excuse to neglect professional development. Instead, they advocate for a ‘balanced approach’ that acknowledges the challenges of dual roles while maintaining a strong commitment to professional achievement.

It has long been established that family obligations—rooted in gendered role division and socialisation—pose significant obstacles to women’s professional development across societies and sectors (Bhalalusesa, 1998; Hitti et al., 2022; Jáuregui & Olivos, 2018; Opportunity Now, 2000; Thomas et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2000; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). The findings of this study reinforce this enduring reality, highlighting how women English language teachers continue to navigate persistent socio-cultural constraints in their personal and professional lives.

What is particularly instructive, however, is the respondents’ adoption of a balanced approach to negotiate the dual burden of familial expectations and professional responsibilities—an imbalance that often places women at a structural disadvantage compared to their male colleagues (Ahl, 2007; Christianson et al., 2021). This approach does not imply a surrender to patriarchal norms. It, rather, reflects a strategic and constructive means of resisting them by cultivating intersecting forms of resilience and agency, as feminist theory encourages (Crenshaw, 1991).

Indeed, women English language teachers have asserted their agency and resilience, much like their counterparts in UNESCO’s E-9 countries—including Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh—by refusing to be overwhelmed by domestic responsibilities (UNESCO, 2000). This strategy is especially relevant in light of

recent evidence suggesting that economic development alone does not necessarily reduce gender-based discrimination or alleviate the domestic pressures faced by professional women (Davis, 2023). What is required, then, is more than economic growth—the agency and capacity of women to lead the changes they seek.

By building such agency, these teachers are not merely coping, but are challenging systemic barriers and strengthening English language teaching in the process.

Responding to Gaps and Challenges

This section outlines the measures that women English language teachers identify as essential to addressing the professional development gaps and challenges they encounter. These include policy-level and operational recommendations such as steadfast family support, the cultivation of agency among professional women, equitable sharing of domestic responsibilities and the establishment of enabling school environments. Grounded in their lived experiences, these suggestions—if effectively implemented—have the potential to foster a more equitable professional landscape for women English teachers, who are often marginalised not only by patriarchal value systems but also by internalised complacency.

Family Support. The study highlights the family as a critical factor influencing the professional development of women English language teachers. While supportive families can foster growth, traditionally minded families often obstruct professional pursuits. This dual role aligns with UN Women’s (2023) observation that families can act as both facilitators and barriers. This observation reinforces that positive familial support is essential to mitigating negative influences.

Most respondents of the study note that families—especially in post-marital and joint family settings—tend to be unreceptive to women’s professional

engagement. However, the study also reveals that such familial resistance is not fixed. Several teachers attributed their career choices to family encouragement, sometimes receiving more support from in-laws than parents. This finding reflects the socialisation theories emphasising the family's role in shaping professional identities (Bandura, 1986).

All participants emphasised family support as foundational to women's psychological empowerment and confidence in pursuing professional goals. As Sales (1999) notes, professional women serve as agents of social change by modelling alternative gender roles, which can gradually transform resistant family norms. This underscores the importance of changing family mentalities to confront gender inequalities and violence (Chauhan et al., 2022; UN Women, 2023).

Narayan's (2023) argument that changing patriarchal cultural values is impossible without transforming family mindsets is particularly relevant. One respondent's suggestion to include family mentality change in professional development programmes highlights the link between individual and institutional change.

Participant accounts reveal that liberal families not only foster an enabling environment for women English language teachers but also catalyse transformative changes in institutional culture through ripple effects, ultimately enhancing both the science and art of English language teaching, as Weisman (2012) explains.

Agency Building. A majority of respondents stressed the necessity for women English language teachers to develop agency, the capability to make decisions regarding their professional needs and aspirations, despite structural barriers. This aligns with Sen's (2016) capability approach, which views agency as central to human development and gender equality (Nussbaum, 2011).

Agency involves both cognitive recognition of structural impediments and the operational ability to negotiate and transform these constraints, especially within decision-making arenas (Balconi, 2010; Donald et al., 2020). The women English language teachers' emphasis on 'struggle,' 'confidence,' 'leadership,' and 'human rights' reflects the critical components of agency freedoms (Sen, 2016).

Van Oosten et al. (2017) describe agency-building as an innovative professional development approach. While originally applied in STEM leadership, it can also support women English language teachers working in specialised, non-traditional roles in Nepal. This highlights the importance of a feminist-informed approach to professional development, which combines teaching skills with empowerment and rights-based education (Crenshaw, 1991; Hooks, 2000).

The findings advocate that professional development should extend beyond teaching skills to include agency-building components—such as human rights, gender justice and feminism—that foster internal courage, psychological equality and leadership abilities, including the capacity to organise collective dialogue. These components are not only vital for empowering women teachers but also integral to enriching English language teaching, which thrives on inclusive, dialogic and critical pedagogies. Such transformative processes require active support from school leadership to institutionalise agency-building efforts within the professional development landscape.

Burden Sharing. Burden-sharing has emerged as a critical strategy to alleviate pressures faced by women English language teachers, encompassing both domestic and institutional domains.

As the participants suggest, sharing domestic responsibilities reduces physical and psychological stress and reinforces the message that families value and support

women's professional roles. This finding is consistent with studies highlighting the link between domestic workload redistribution and women's career advancement (UN Women, 2023; World Economic Forum, 2023).

Within schools, burden-sharing manifests through collegiality, mentorship and collaborative problem-solving. Participants emphasised how such support lessens individual workload and fosters professional growth. This aligns with literature underscoring mentorship and collegiality as facilitators of teacher development and retention (Badri et al., 2016; Crandall & Finn, 2014; Harris & Anthony, 2001; Kee & Luan, 1996). The emphasis on burden-sharing reflects broader calls in gender and organisational studies for workload redistribution to address systemic inequalities (Jáuregui & Olivos, 2018; Northouse, 2010; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). If these measures are not institutionalised, gender gaps are likely to continue. The World Economic Forum (2023) notes that achieving gender equality will take longer than anticipated, especially when patriarchal norms and values reemerge with additional strength (Pannett, 2023).

Ultimately, burden-sharing is not just a pragmatic response to excessive workloads. It is a transformative strategy that challenges deep-seated gender norms in both the private and public spheres. When domestic and institutional responsibilities are equitably distributed, women English language teachers are better positioned to thrive professionally, contribute meaningfully to educational quality and assert their agency. This redistribution of labour, however, cannot be left to individual goodwill alone. It must be structurally embedded through gender-sensitive policies, leadership accountability and cultural shifts that redefine care work and collegial responsibility. Without such systemic commitment, efforts to bridge gender gaps in professional development will remain short-term and unsustainable, which ultimately undermines

the potential of English language teaching to serve as a vehicle for empowerment and social change.

Enabling School Environment and Institutional Support: The study finds that most schools lack an environment conducive to the professional development of women English language teachers. This gap is marked by limited opportunities for reflection, peer collaboration and leadership support. Opportunities for more formal and structured learning initiatives are even more scarce.

The absence of proactive and empathetic leadership hinders the cultivation of supportive, learning-oriented schools. Research corroborates that effective leadership is essential for fostering teacher growth and transforming schools into learning institutions (Datnow, 2020; Finn, 2014; Richards & Farrell, 2005). The study does not find such leadership except in a few schools.

Participants instead report that school administrations often overlook the specific needs of women teachers, including emotional support and administrative flexibility during critical life events such as pregnancy. Such indifference reflects entrenched patriarchal attitudes, perpetuating systemic discrimination despite ongoing gender equality efforts at the global level (Pannett, 2023).

The lack of gender-sensitive policies and emotional security compromises women English language teachers' well-being and professional advancement, which, as a result, compromises the quality of English language teaching. This underscores calls for schools to adopt gender-aware policies that promote respectful equality, psychological safety and an equal space for all teachers (Connell, 2009; UNESCO, 2019).

While individual, familial and institutional interventions are necessary, this study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive, nationwide strategies that

ensure consistency and inclusivity. These strategies should incorporate policy measures such as study leave, targeted scholarships and structural reforms that promote equitable representation and sustained professional growth of women English language teachers. This is not a novel demand but a reaffirmation of the commitments already enshrined in the Constitution of Nepal and reflected in national education policies in alignment with international human rights frameworks such as CEDAW. What remains crucial is translating these commitments into concrete action to enhance and improve the quality and equity of English language teaching in Nepal.

Reflection on the Self and Profession

This section presents a blend of reflections—those shared by women English language teachers and those shaped by my own engagement with their stories. Their voices offer powerful insight into how they perceive their profession, navigate constraints and derive meaning from their work. Alongside these narratives, I interweave my own reflections as a researcher and educator, informed by the broader socio-cultural context in which these teachers operate. Together, these perspectives demonstrate how professional identity, motivation and gender intersect in complex ways.

Exploring how women English language teachers perceive their profession provides insight into their psychological and motivational attachment to teaching. The research underscores that teacher professional development is deeply dependent upon teachers' psychological commitment and motivation toward their profession (Cook et al., 2017; Hismanoglu, 2010; McCallum et al., 2017; Muyan, 2013).

The study reveals that, overall, women English language teachers are satisfied with their profession and remain committed to performing their duties as effectively as possible despite, and aware of, the barriers along the way. Their professional

journey is often marked by insufficient support from male colleagues, school administrations, and, in some cases, even from female peers. These challenges, however, have not diminished their intrinsic motivation, as none of the participants expressed regret about their choice of English language teaching as a profession.

On the contrary, nearly half of the participants perceive English language teaching as an ideal career that accommodates both family responsibilities and societal contributions. One participant noted that the identity of an English language teacher brings social respect and recognition, even within a patriarchal framework. This recognition, she explained, provides a sense of satisfaction and helps mitigate the inherent challenges of the profession. Another respondent described the personal fulfilment she experiences from guiding and supporting students, especially girls, who often feel more secure sharing their problems with women teachers. “Listening to the problems of female students and being able to help them gives me extra happiness,” she remarked.

Helping girl students in particular is to help build a new generation of change agents required to transform not only teaching, which still is a male-dominant profession, but also the socio-cultural context in which teaching takes place. This insight echoes previous findings (Eble & Hu, 2020; Jackie, 2006; UNESCO, 2001), which highlight the stronger rapport between female students and women teachers. Research by Sales (1999) and Lee et al. (2019) also underlines the crucial role of women teachers in fostering girl-friendly learning environments, which enhance girls’ retention and academic achievement, and also promote equality and inclusion within broader society.

As a woman researcher, I found these reflections especially moving. They underscored how women teachers’ emotional labour—often invisible or

unrecognised—is a powerful force in shaping student experiences and making inclusive classrooms. Their accounts remind me that teaching is not just a profession for them. It is a space for care, influence and identity formation, both for themselves and their students. It is also a venue for social and institutional reform.

However, not all participants are fully satisfied. Some voiced discontent not with the profession itself, but with the ways in which it is perceived by society and the state. Teaching is still not given the same prestige as civil service roles, and prevailing middle-class attitudes tend to devalue the profession. For several participants, this lack of societal respect is compounded by the failure to acknowledge the dual roles women play, as professionals and as primary caregivers at home. This undervaluation of their invisible labour remains a persistent source of discouragement.

Reflecting on these tensions, I am reminded of the structural and cultural barriers that continue to shape how women teachers experience their professional lives. Their ability to find meaning and pride in teaching despite systemic undervaluation is both inspiring and troubling. It reflects resilience, but also highlights how gendered expectations continue to limit what is possible, both personally and professionally.

Central to the study's findings is that women English language teachers are generally satisfied with their profession and are committed to investing time and energy in developing their professional capacities, reflecting key insights of socio-cultural theory (Darvin & Norton, 2023). They are fully aware of the social, economic and personal benefits such an investment can bring. However, this sense of fulfilment is often undermined by a persistent lack of appreciation from families, schools and society at large for the dual roles they perform—both as teachers and caregivers. Bridging this gap calls not only for institutional reforms but also for a broader cultural

shift that genuinely values the emotional and intellectual labour of teaching, especially as carried out by women English language teachers.

Unless the grip of patriarchy—which continues to devalue women’s contributions—is meaningfully challenged, women professionals, including English language teachers, will remain constrained in their ability to contribute to society to their fullest potential. Holding onto patriarchal norms will be an obstacle to women’s public life. It will also constrain society from liberating itself from entrenched inequalities, limiting social progress and the full realisation of human potential.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents findings related to women English language teachers’ knowledge, resources, challenges, personal initiatives, and perspectives on professional development.

The first sub-section highlights teacher professional development (PD) as a dual process of acquiring new skills and unlearning ingrained practices. Respondents view PD as a continuous, context-specific process shaped by social and cultural factors. They emphasise the need to challenge traditional beliefs that prioritise domestic roles for women, which often hinder their professional growth. Additionally, respondents identify teacher well-being, effective student engagement, and problem-solving as critical components of PD.

The second sub-section evaluates available PD resources, categorising them into government-facilitated, school-initiated, and private-sector offerings. While government programmes are often theoretical and less practical, non-government resources are generally more effective but remain inaccessible to many. School management committees frequently fail to improve the teaching environment, and

many women teachers struggle to utilise free online resources due to heavy workloads and motivational barriers.

The third sub-section identifies key gaps and challenges faced by women English language teachers. These include a lack of supportive environments at home and in schools, particularly after marriage. Respondents noted a lack of collegiality that impedes professional growth, as well as excessive workloads that reduce motivation and increase stress. Compounding these issues is the absence of measures to alleviate burdens during critical periods, such as pregnancy. Gendered parenting further reinforces patriarchal norms, demotivating women teachers and limiting their professional aspirations.

The fourth sub-section highlights the proactive initiatives taken by women teachers to address these challenges. These include self-study and self-initiated training programmes. Respondents stress the importance of balancing domestic responsibilities with professional roles as a key factor in achieving success.

The fifth sub-section explores strategies to overcome these challenges. Family support is identified as crucial for professional development, though it is often difficult to secure post-marriage. Building agency is also emphasised as a means for women to take ownership of their professional growth. Burden-sharing at home and in schools is vital for supporting women teachers. Sharing domestic responsibilities allows them to focus on their professional duties, while a supportive school environment fosters well-being and motivation through reflective learning and peer collaboration.

Finally, the chapter concludes with women English language teachers' self-assessments. Despite the challenges, they express overall satisfaction with their roles, finding fulfilment in serving society while managing household responsibilities.

However, they note that their dual roles are often overlooked by both family and society, underscoring the need for greater recognition and support.

Chapter Six

Conclusion and Implications

This final chapter synthesises the key insights derived from the analysis and interpretation of data (Chapter 4) and the subsequent discussion of findings (Chapter 5). It presents a comprehensive summary of the study's findings, framed against relevant theoretical perspectives, followed by pedagogical and policy implications aimed at enhancing teacher professional development. Additionally, the chapter highlights directions for future research informed by the study's findings and limitations. Through this integrative approach, the chapter aims to offer a coherent closure that not only reflects on the professional realities of women English language teachers in Nepal but also points towards actionable pathways for reform and further study.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study are organised around several central themes that emerged from participants' narratives. Women English language teachers in Nepal navigate a professional development landscape marked by limited and unevenly distributed opportunities. Government-provided training programmes are often theoretical and lack classroom applicability, while school-led initiatives, such as workshops, are sporadic due to limited awareness and resources. Non-governmental programmes, though comparatively more effective, depend heavily on individual initiative. Online resources, the other crucial source of TPD, remain underutilised due to time constraints and heavy workloads of the women English language teachers.

Despite recognising the transformative potential of professional growth—encompassing personal empowerment, enhanced student outcomes and societal progress—these teachers face significant barriers. These barriers are perpetuated by

patriarchal norms, discursive violence, epistemic injustice, cognitive rigidity and internalised gender stereotypes. These internalised beliefs frequently undermine their confidence and reinforce a cycle of self-doubt that hampers their ability to fully embrace professional growth and contribute effectively to English language teaching. Addressing these challenges requires both structural reforms and a cultural shift within the educational community to value diverse perspectives and empower women teachers to overcome self-imposed limitations.

Patriarchal barriers remain pervasive. Symbolic violence manifests in the disproportionate burden of domestic responsibilities, restricting women teachers' professional opportunities and devaluing their contributions to education. Discursive violence reinforces societal narratives that marginalise women's professional roles, framing their ambitions as secondary to domestic duties and silencing their voices in institutional decision-making. School environments vary widely. Some foster inclusivity and collegiality, while others perpetuate entrenched gender biases.

Women teachers also confront internalised gender stereotypes, such as feelings of inadequacy or inferiority, which undermine their confidence. Structural inequities persist in resource allocation, leadership opportunities and decision-making processes, perpetuating systemic barriers to professional growth. Male teachers' cognitive rigidity further exacerbates these challenges, sustaining exclusionary practices and limiting opportunities for inclusive reforms.

Despite these substantial challenges, the study found that women English language teachers demonstrate remarkable agency and resilience. Many participants actively negotiate the complex realities of their professional and domestic lives by cultivating self-confidence, assertiveness and leadership capabilities. This agency

enables them to resist and challenge patriarchal norms, drawing on inner strength and support networks to sustain their professional identities and aspirations.

The critical role of family support and burden-sharing emerged as vital to women teachers' professional development. Participants emphasised how the redistribution of domestic responsibilities within their households and encouragement from family members foster psychological well-being and allow more time for professional learning. Similarly, burden-sharing within schools—through collegiality, mentorship and collaborative problem-solving—proved essential for alleviating workloads and creating supportive environments conducive to growth.

To address these multifaceted barriers, systemic changes are essential. Schools must institutionalise equitable resource distribution, provide psychologically secure workplaces that foster inclusivity and mutual respect, and offer administrative support during critical life stages such as pregnancy and childcare. Additionally, creating an environment where women teachers feel empowered to voice their perspectives and participate in leadership roles is necessary for driving long-term reform.

Beyond the school level, participants highlight the need for comprehensive national strategies to promote gender equity in education. This includes policy measures such as study leave, targeted scholarships and structural reforms aimed at ensuring equitable representation and sustained professional growth for women English language teachers. These policy interventions align with commitments made in the Constitution of Nepal and international human rights instruments, including CEDAW, underscoring the importance of coordinated efforts at multiple levels to bring about meaningful change.

Throughout the research process, my awareness of these dynamics, informed by my own professional experience as a woman English language teacher in Nepal,

has helped shape a nuanced understanding of the participants' realities and, through them, the current state of women English language teachers' professional development in Nepal.

Conclusion

This study highlights the complex interplay of knowledge, opportunities, challenges, coping strategies and future aspirations that shape the professional development of women English language teachers in Nepal. It reveals how these teachers navigate deeply entrenched patriarchal structures with remarkable resilience and agency, while using available opportunities and confronting systemic barriers.

Participants perceive professional development as both practical and aspirational, grounded in formal training programmes, workshops and exposure to national and international pedagogies. These experiences provide a foundation for skill enhancement and capacity building, though access to opportunities remains uneven due to socio-cultural constraints. The growing availability of digital platforms offers new avenues for self-directed learning and professional networking. However, their potential is curtailed by inequitable access and unsupportive institutional environments.

Despite acknowledging the transformative power of professional growth—for personal empowerment, improved student outcomes and broader societal advancement—women English language teachers continue to face substantial obstacles. Epistemic injustice marginalises their knowledge and voices in key decision-making spaces, while cognitive rigidity among male colleagues sustains discriminatory practices. Symbolic violence emerges through disproportionate domestic responsibilities and discursive violence perpetuates social narratives that devalue their professional aspirations. Together, these systemic forces create barriers

that restrict their full participation and advancement within English language teaching.

In response, these teachers display considerable resilience. They actively engage with available development resources, strengthen their pedagogical skills and pursue leadership capacities. Their agency is evident in their deliberate resistance to patriarchal norms and sustained efforts to advance professionally, even under challenging circumstances. Drawing on feminist perspectives, this study underscores that dismantling gendered barriers requires not only individual initiative but also collective and institutional support. Yet, the absence of enabling family and school environments continues to restrict their full participation, a reality aptly explained by the capability approach.

Looking forward, participants envision systemic change characterised by gender-sensitive policies, equitable resource access, inclusive development opportunities and participatory school governance. They advocate for administrative flexibility that accommodates life stages such as pregnancy and childcare and for broader social reforms that challenge patriarchal norms and promote shared domestic responsibilities. Fostering mutual respect and collaboration between male and female educators is also seen as essential to advancing equity within professional spaces.

By confronting these intersecting barriers and affirming the strengths and aspirations of women English language teachers, Nepal's education system can progress toward a more inclusive and transformative future. Empowering these educators not only expands and enriches their knowledge of ELT and instructional practices but also strengthens their role in fostering an inclusive and equitable school environment. Together, these improvements contribute both to enhanced educational outcomes and broader social change.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes several original contributions to the fields of teacher professional development, English language teaching, gender studies and socio-cultural educational research. It centres the experiences of women English language teachers in Nepal, a group whose voices remain underrepresented in academic discourse. By highlighting their perspectives, the research uncovers the unique challenges they face and the strategic responses they employ, thereby contributing to a situated, gender-sensitive understanding of teacher development in the context of English language teaching in the Global South.

The study presents an integrated analytical framework that employs feminist theory, the capability approach, socio-cultural theory and the concept of patriarchy to explore how women English language teachers' agency interacts with socio-economic structures. This theoretical triangulation offers a nuanced reading of how women English language teachers navigate and resist symbolic, discursive and institutional forms of violence embedded within patriarchal socio-cultural contexts. The framework shows how personal agency and structural constraints simultaneously shape the professional lives of these teachers.

Furthermore, the study contributes to policy-relevant knowledge by revealing that formal teacher development programmes frequently overlook the socio-cultural and patriarchal barriers obstructing women's participation. It exposes a disconnect between rhetorical commitments to gender equality and the lived realities of women educators in Nepal's community schools. These insights expand the discourse on professional development from a narrowly pedagogical focus to encompass broader concerns of social justice and institutional reform.

Overall, this study documents both the persistent barriers and the transformative potential of women English language teachers. By situating their narratives within the broader frameworks of sociocultural theory, patriarchy, the capability approach and feminism, it advances understanding of how education systems—especially in the context of English language teaching in low-resource settings—can be reimagined to foster gender equity, empower women teachers and cultivate inclusive professional cultures.

Implications of the Study

This subsection presents the major implications of the study, organised into two key categories: pedagogical implications for teacher professional development and research implications for future inquiry. These implications emerge directly from the findings of the study and the conclusions. They provide insights that can inform policy formulation, teaching practices and scholarly exploration.

Although the study is grounded in the lived experiences of women English language teachers in Nepal, many of its insights extend beyond this specific context. The challenges identified—including structural inequities, restricted access to meaningful professional training and the pervasive influence of socio-cultural norms—reflect broader systemic issues prevalent across education sectors globally. Therefore, the implications discussed here hold relevance not only for advancing equitable professional development for women teachers in Nepal but also for fostering comprehensive reforms that benefit teachers and other educators in diverse educational contexts.

Implications for English Language Teaching and Teacher Development

This study highlights the critical need for systemic, institutional, societal and pedagogical reforms to enhance the professional development of women English

language teachers in Nepal. Without addressing these interrelated domains, efforts toward professional growth and improvements in English Language Teaching risk remaining fragmented, inaccessible, or ineffective, especially for those navigating entrenched gendered hierarchies and limited resources.

Addressing Patriarchal Biases: It is important for training programmes to help teachers and educational stakeholders recognise and challenge deep-rooted patriarchal norms influencing school cultures and classroom dynamics. Such efforts can contribute to creating more equitable and inclusive environments that benefit English language teaching practices and student learning.

Regular, Needs-Based Training: Periodic, context-sensitive training tailored to the specific professional and personal needs of women teachers can support meaningful development. In ELT, this includes practical classroom strategies that incorporate communicative language teaching, address the complexities of multilingual classrooms and employ identity-affirming pedagogies responsive to Nepal's linguistic and cultural diversity. Such tailored support has the potential to enhance teacher confidence and foster more effective, inclusive English language learning.

Embedding Reflection Practices: Incorporating structured reflection into teacher development programmes may encourage continuous professional growth, strengthen collegial relationships and support teacher well-being. Reflective practices contribute to building agency among women ELT teachers, aligning with the capability approach's focus on empowerment and human flourishing.

Empowering School Management Committees (SMCs): Gender-sensitive training for SMC members could help cultivate supportive institutional environments that are important for teacher development and school improvement. Empowered

SMCs may play a critical role in challenging symbolic and discursive violence that restricts women's participation and advancement in ELT professions.

Promoting Gender-Neutral Socialisation: Campaigns and curricular reforms aimed at challenging gender stereotypes from early childhood have the potential to influence societal attitudes positively. Over time, such changes might enhance perceptions of women teachers and bolster support for their professional roles within ELT and beyond.

Enhancing Female Teacher Agency: Programmes focused on strengthening the agency of women ELT teachers can be instrumental in helping them navigate male-dominated institutional settings and systemic barriers. These initiatives resonate with feminist theories that highlight resistance, empowerment and transformative change, which ultimately benefits both teachers and students.

Implications for Future Research

Building on the findings and limitations of the study, future research can explore several areas to deepen understanding of the professional development of women English language teachers in Nepal. Such research has the potential to inform more context-sensitive interventions and foster inclusive educational reform, particularly within the field of ELT.

Expanding Regional Focus: A broader examination of teachers' experiences across Nepal's diverse geographic and socio-cultural contexts could uncover regional disparities and unique challenges, thereby guiding the development of targeted policy responses.

Incorporating Diverse Stakeholder Perspectives: Including the voices of male teachers, school administrators, policymakers and community members may

offer a more comprehensive understanding of the systemic barriers and enablers influencing women's professional growth.

Examining Socio-Economic Influences: Investigating the roles of caste, class and economic status in shaping women teachers' professional development trajectories can provide valuable insights for crafting more equitable and intersectional approaches.

Analysing Leadership Dynamics: Comparative studies focusing on leadership styles and practices in male-led versus women-led schools could reveal factors that promote inclusivity and better support the professional aspirations of women teachers.

Evaluating School Management Committee Effectiveness: Exploring the structural and socio-cultural factors contributing to the underperformance of SMCs can inform strategies to strengthen their role as key allies in teacher development and school-level reform.

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Appendix I: Guiding Questions for Interview

These questions were used as a guide to discussion and interaction. Follow-up questions were picked from the discussion.

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| <p>The main objective of the study is to explore how women English language teachers are developing professionally, amidst the difficulties and challenges they are facing both at home and in the work setting.</p> <p>d. Explore professional development opportunities available</p> <p>e. Understand lived experiences of challenges and barriers</p> <p>f. Collect efforts made by women English language teachers to deal with the barriers</p> <p>g. Explore ideas about the future (how the situation can be improved)</p> | |
| Name of the Teacher: | |
| Final Degree: | |
| Teaching Experience (Years): | |
| Name of the school: | |
| Address: | |
| <p>RQ 1: What are the main professional development resources available? How are they distributed?</p> | |
| RQ1.1 Have you heard of professional development? If yes, what do you know of it? | |
| RQ1.2 Why do you think professional development is necessary for a teacher? | |
| RQ1.3 Should teachers learn? Why should they learn? | |
| RQ1.4 Do you think your school administration is aware of the need of professional development of their teachers? | |
| RQ1.5 How often are staff meetings held? Do you discuss teacher learning and development issues in staff meetings? Do you get heard? | |
| RQ1.6 What measures has the school administration taken to address the learning needs of teachers? | |
| RQ1.7 Are there any other agencies to listen to you and support you? | |
| RQ1.8 Who gets the priority (between men and women teachers) when an opportunity is available? | |
| <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Are you the first? If you are not, how do you feel about it?</p> | |
| RQ1.9 What specific skills or domain knowledge do you need now? | |
| RQ1.10 Do you use any technology for learning and teaching? If yes how and why? If | |

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|--|
| not, why? |
| RQ 2: How do women English language teachers explain their experiences and perceptions about the professional development environment, opportunities, access and constraints? |
| RQ2.1 What learning opportunities are available to you and your colleagues? Training? Workshops? Exposure visits? |
| RQ2.2 Who designs such opportunities? - Are you consulted in their design and implementation? Are your needs reflected in the opportunities? |
| RQ2.3 Do you organise peer discussions and internal learning and sharing sessions? - Are such sessions helpful? What issues are discussed in such sessions? |
| RQ2.4 Do you seek help from your colleagues or seniors in teaching-learning? - In what areas? Do you get the help you need? |
| RQ2.5 How does school administration support you in your learning and skill development? |
| RQ2.6 Are there any other agencies to support you? - Who are they? - How do they support? Does the support relate to your need? |
| RQ2.7 How many learning and skill development opportunities have you had in the last 12 months? |
| RQ2.8 Do you remember any opportunity that you denied participating? If you did so, why? |
| RQ2.9 Do you prepare for your class at home? How much time do you spend to prepare for your class? |
| RQ2.10 How does your family feel about you spending time in preparing for your class? |
| RQ2.11 Can you leave home for training or exposure away from your village/district? Does your family support you in going away from home? |
| RQ2.12 Do you have a library in your school? - How much time do you spend in the library? What resources do you have? |

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| RQ2.13 Do you feel any difficulty working with your colleagues at school? Does the school administration give you the care and support you need? |
| RQ2.14 Do you think you would get better treatment and care if you were a male teacher? |
| RQ2.15 Have you ever experienced inequality/humiliation in school? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did you respond to the situation? - Who did you turn to for help? Did you get the help? |
| RQ2.16 Do you face any difficulty inside your classroom? If yes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What kind of difficulties? How do you respond to those? |
| RQ2.17 Do students behave differently with male teachers? If they do, why do you think so? |
| RQ1.18 How do you feel about your job overall? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are you happy? Do you think it is a male's area and you are in the wrong place? |
| RQ.3 What are gaps, challenges and obstacles to the professional development of women English language teachers ? |
| RQ3.1 Did you get the same treatment (support, care, schooling) as your brother when you were a child? Could you do differently now if you were treated differently as a child? |
| RQ3.2 Which school did you study? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public or private? Did your brother/s go to the same school? If no, why? |
| RQ3.3 How were you treated in school? Did you get the same treatment as other schoolboys? |
| RQ3.4 As a woman English teacher, what major obstacles and difficulties do you face? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At the family level - At the school level At the community level |
| RQ3.3 How do the difficulties affect your teaching and professional development? |
| RQ 4 How do women English language teachers deal with the situation? |
| RQ4.1 How do you address the difficulty? |

| |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you do to professionally update yourself and build skills? - Turn to colleagues? What else? |
| RQ4.2 How do you deal with domestic pressure? |
| RQ.5 What remedies do women English language teachers suggest vis-à-vis the gaps and challenges? |
| <p>RQ5.1 What do you think are necessary to improve the situation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What should be done at the personal level (by you)? - What should be done at the family level? - What should be done at the school level? <p>What should be done at the national level?</p> |
| <p>RQ5.2 Do you think you can be a leader English teacher in Nepal? What makes you the leader?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What should you do? - What should your school and community do? - What should your peers do? - What should the government do? |
| <p>RQ5.3 What specific professional support do you need now to develop you into a leader?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training (on what)? - Exposure (for what)? <p>Other support, such as?</p> |
| RQ5.4: What should be done to deal with social and cultural barriers that affect women from childhood and continue through their professional lives? |
| RQ5.5 If you were an education minister (who makes educational policies), what would you do for English teachers like you? |
| Finally, please tell me a little bit about your educational and professional journey until today. |

Appendix II: Interview Data Coding Process

This appendix describes the coding process used to analyse qualitative data from interviews with 14 women English language teachers, as presented in Chapter 4. The process follows a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and is structured around the research questions, which guided the organisation of the data and the development of themes.

1. Data Preparation

a. **Transcription:** Interview responses were transcribed from audio recordings and field notes. Each participant's responses were organised into a tabular format, categorised under the five main research questions:

- What are the participants' knowledge and experiences of professional development?
- What resources and opportunities are available for TPD?
- What are the gaps, challenges, and obstacles to TPD?
- What initiatives do women English language teachers take against these challenges?
- What measures are necessary to improve the PD environment?

b. **Data Cleaning:** Transcripts were reviewed for accuracy, correcting typographical errors and clarifying ambiguous phrases (e.g., ensuring consistency in terms like "professional development" and "TPD"). Non-English phrases (e.g., "tara ke game?" by Sani) were retained with translations to preserve cultural context.

2. Familiarisation with Data

The researcher repeatedly read the transcripts and field notes to immerse themselves in the data, noting initial patterns such as frequent mentions of "continuous learning," "patriarchal barriers," "family responsibilities," and "lack of school support."

Observations from field notes, such as participants' emotional emphasis on gender discrimination, were also considered to contextualise responses.

3. Initial Coding

a. **Open Coding:** Responses were segmented into units of meaning and codes were assigned based on explicit and implicit content. Codes were generated inductively, reflecting the content of the data while aligning with the research questions. Examples include:

Table 1: Example of representative quotes from the codebook

| Code | Definition | Example Quote |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Continuous learning | Ongoing acquisition of knowledge and skills | “It requires teachers to learn continuously to be updated...” (Binu, June 25, 2025) |
| Patriarchal influence | Attitudes and norms that limit women’s professional roles | “Male teachers and administrators often take it for granted ...” (Mina, March 2022) |
| Interpersonal learning | Collaborative learning through peer discussions | “We have the space for sharing knowledge...” (Rita, March 27, 2022) |
| Family responsibilities | Domestic duties impacting professional development | “I had a small baby to give my time to...” (Kripa, April 8, 2022) |

- Binu’s statement, “It requires teachers to learn continuously to be updated about emerging issues and ideas,” was coded as “Continuous learning.”
- Mina’s comment, “male teachers and administrators often take it for granted that women teachers cannot manage time for leadership,” was coded as “Patriarchal attitudes.”
- Rita’s remark, “We have the space for sharing knowledge as well as problems among teachers,” was coded as “Interpersonal sharing.”

b. **Development of a Codebook:** A codebook was developed to document codes, their definitions, and example quotes (see Table 1).

4. Theme Development

a. **Primary Themes:** The five research questions served as primary themes, as the data were already organised under these questions in Chapter 4.

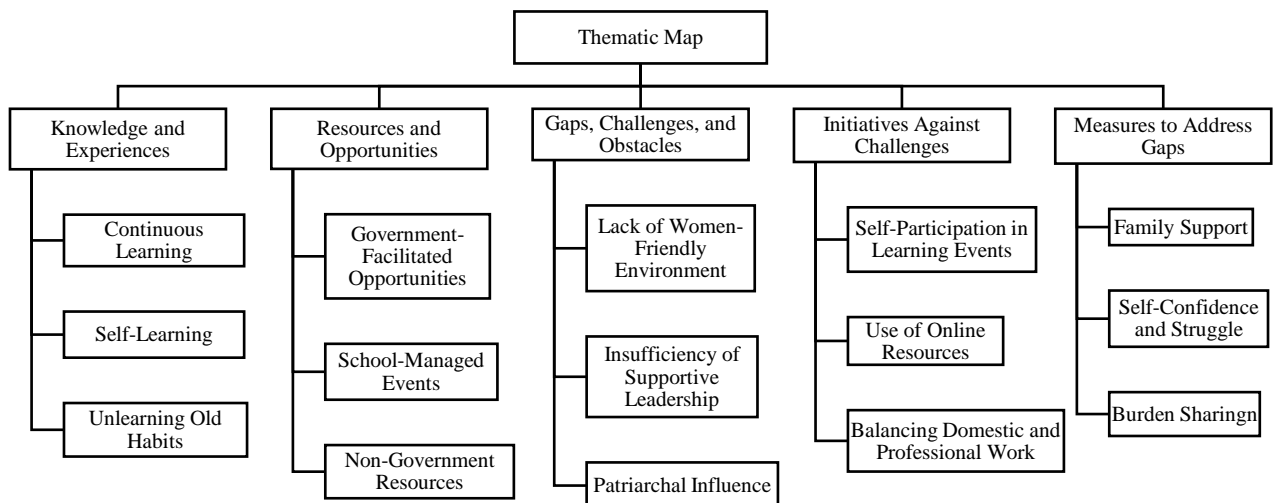
b. **Sub-Themes:** Codes were grouped into clusters based on patterns across responses. This involved iterative comparison to identify commonalities. For example:

- **Q1: Knowledge and Experiences:** Sub-themes included - Continuous Learning, Self-Learning, Unlearning Old Habits, Skills to Relate with Students, Collaborative Learning, and Motivation Towards Teaching.
- **Q2: Resources and Opportunities:** Sub-themes included – Government-Facilitated Opportunities, School-Managed Events and Non-Government Resources.

- **Q3: Gaps, Challenges, and Obstacles:** Sub-themes included – Lack of Women-Friendly Environment, Insufficiency of Supportive Leadership, Patriarchal Influence, Limited Sharing and Collegiality, Gender-Based Upbringing, Reinforcement of Social Discrimination in Public Institutions, Post-Marital Complexities, and Excessive Workload.
- **Q4: Initiatives Against Challenges:** Sub-themes included – Self-Participation in Learning Events, Use of Online Resources, Balancing Domestic and Professional Work, and Interpersonal Sharing and Collegiality.
- **Q5: Measures to Address Gaps:** Sub-themes included – Family Support, Self-Confidence and Struggle, Burden Sharing, and Proactive School Leadership.

Overlapping codes were merged into broader sub-themes to avoid redundancy.

Figure 1: Thematic Map of Coding Process



5. Reviewing and Refining Themes

Themes and sub-themes were cross-checked with the original transcripts to ensure accuracy and relevance to the research questions. For instance, the sub-theme “Unlearning Old Habits” was refined to focus specifically on patriarchal habits after reviewing responses from Mina and Anita.

A thematic map was created to visualise the relationships between primary themes and sub-themes (see Figure 1).

6. Validation and Reliability

a. **Cross-Checking:** The data was coded for consistency. When discrepancies arose (e.g., coding ‘time management’ vs. ‘family responsibilities’), the full interview records were reviewed to clarify the meaning and the codebook was updated accordingly.

b. **Member Checking:** Preliminary themes were shared with select participants (e.g., Anita, Mina) to confirm the accuracy of interpretations to ensure their experiences were faithfully represented.

7. Finalising the Analysis

The finalised themes and sub-themes were documented with supporting quotes, forming the basis for the narrative in Chapter 4. A summary table provides an overview of the coding outcomes (see Table 2).

Table 2: Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes

| Primary Themes | Sub-Themes |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Knowledge and Experiences (Q1) | Continuous Learning, Self-Learning, Unlearning Old Habits, Skills to Relate with Students, Collaborative Learning, Motivation Towards Teaching |
| Resources and Opportunities (Q2) | Government-Facilitated Opportunities, School-Managed Events, Non-Government Resources, Library and References |
| Gaps, Challenges, and Obstacles (Q3) | Lack of Women-Friendly Environment, Insufficiency of Supportive Leadership, Patriarchal Influence, Limited Sharing and Collegiality, Gender-Based Upbringing, Post-Marital Complexities, Excessive Workload |
| Initiatives against Challenges (Q4) | Self-Participation in Learning Events, Use of Online Resources, Balancing Domestic and Professional Work, Interpersonal Sharing and Collegiality |
| Measures to Address Gaps (Q5) | Family Support, Self-Confidence and Struggle, Burden Sharing, Proactive School Leadership |

8. Notes on Challenges

- a. **Language:** Some responses included Nepali phrases (e.g., “tara ke garne?” by Sani), requiring careful translation to retain meaning.
- b. **Incomplete Data:** A few responses were brief or vague, limiting the depth of certain sub-themes (e.g., “Motivation Towards Teaching” was less developed due to fewer detailed responses).

- c. **Bias Mitigation:** Iterative reviews and peer consultation ensured objectivity, minimising researcher bias in code and theme development.



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