

# Energizing the Teacher Potentials for Teaching English in Diverse Socio-Cultural and Geo-Political Contexts in Nepal

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## ABSTRACT

In Nepal's multilingual and multicultural context, teaching English poses distinct challenges and opportunities. Teachers are central to ensuring effective English language learning, but their potential is often undermined by inadequate training, poor infrastructure, and mismatched national policies that fail to consider local diversity. This study explored how to energize teacher potentials by focusing on socio-cultural inclusivity, professional development, and geo-political considerations in Nepal. Drawing on qualitative data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis, the research investigates the current challenges and emerging solutions from teachers' perspectives across different regions. The findings show that teachers can become transformative agents when equipped with context-sensitive pedagogy, culturally responsive training, and community engagement tools. The study recommends decentralizing teacher education, investing in continuous and reflective professional development, and involving teachers in curriculum design. Energizing teacher potential is thus framed not just as a pedagogical goal, but as a socio-political project essential for equitable and effective English education across Nepal.

**Key Words:** English language teaching in Nepal, Teacher professional development, Socio-cultural inclusivity, Culturally responsive pedagogy, Multilingual education Educational equity

## INTRODUCTION

English language teaching in Nepal occurs in a complex interplay of social, cultural, linguistic, and political dynamics. As a country with over 124 languages and numerous ethnic communities (CBS, 2012), Nepal's classrooms represent a microcosm of this national diversity. The status of English as a foreign language in the national curriculum further complicates how it is perceived, learned, and taught (Awasthi, 2003). While English is associated with globalization, upward mobility, and access to higher education, its implementation is not uniform. Disparities exist in terms of infrastructure, teacher qualifications, socio-economic conditions of learners, and regional political stability. These disparities are particularly stark when comparing the Kathmandu Valley to remote districts such as Jumla or Humla, where schools often lack trained teachers, electricity, and basic teaching materials (MOEST, 2020).

Teachers are at the heart of Nepal's English education landscape. They are not just implementers of curriculum, but mediators of language, culture, and identity in the classroom. However, their capacity to deliver effective language instruction is shaped by numerous factors—including access to training, teaching materials, community support, and their own educational backgrounds (Phyak, 2011). In urban centers, English teachers often have access to professional development programs and peer networks. In contrast, rural teachers are expected to meet national standards without comparable support or contextual relevance in training (Giri, 2010). Despite such challenges, many teachers demonstrate ingenuity, using local stories, multilingual strategies, and culturally familiar content to teach English in ways that resonate with their students.

This study aims to critically explore the potential of English teachers in Nepal and how it can be energized to improve English language instruction in socio-culturally and geo-politically diverse contexts. It questions dominant paradigms in teacher training that ignore local realities and argues for a reimagining of teacher

development grounded in contextual understanding. In doing so, the paper draws from the experiences of English teachers across different ecological zones of Nepal: mountain, hill, and Terai and evaluates how their practices are influenced by their environment and community. It also examines policy documents and academic literature to assess how national goals align or misalign with classroom realities. By positioning teachers as agents of change rather than passive recipients of top-down reforms, the study proposes an inclusive, bottom-up approach to professional development.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The English language occupies a unique and often contested position in Nepal's education system, functioning simultaneously as a subject, a medium of instruction, and a gatekeeper to higher education and employment opportunities. Numerous studies have examined the role of English in Nepal, highlighting how its increasing dominance has influenced language policy, social hierarchy, and classroom dynamics (Giri, 2009; Phyak, 2013). Scholars such as Awasthi (2003) and Giri (2010) note that while English enjoys prestige and demand among students and parents alike, the actual implementation of English education is fraught with systemic and contextual challenges. One major issue is the centralized nature of teacher education and curriculum design, which often fails to accommodate the linguistic and cultural diversity that characterizes Nepal's communities. Teacher training programs are largely uniform and theory-driven, offering little space for teachers to adapt pedagogy based on regional, linguistic, and cultural realities (Sah & Li, 2018). Moreover, the rural-urban divide exacerbates disparities in teacher competencies, classroom infrastructure, and access to continuous professional development (MOEST, 2020). In many rural and geographically remote schools, teachers are forced to rely on outdated or irrelevant materials and are often isolated from peer learning communities (Poudel, 2016). The situation is made more difficult by political instability and bureaucratic hurdles that impede the smooth implementation of training programs and education reforms (Carney & Bista, 2009).

Another area of focus in the literature is the notion of culturally responsive and context-sensitive pedagogy. In multilingual and multicultural classrooms, especially in regions like the Terai and the mid-western hills, the exclusive use of English or Nepali in teaching often alienates students whose first language is neither (Phyak, 2015). Researchers argue that when teachers are encouraged to incorporate local languages, stories, and practices into English teaching, both engagement and learning outcomes improve (Benson, 2009; Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2000). This form of translanguaging is not only a practical tool for comprehension but also a way to honor the linguistic identity of learners. Teachers who use such strategies; however, often do so informally and without institutional recognition or support. This points to a critical gap between the lived pedagogical experiences of teachers and the official language education policies, which tend to promote monolingual ideologies (Tollefson & Tsui, 2004). Moreover, literature also emphasizes the psychological and motivational dimensions of teaching. Teachers who are empowered through localized decision-making, collaborative networks, and acknowledgment of their professional knowledge tend to be more innovative and committed to their roles (Fullan, 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Conversely, those who operate in restrictive or poorly supported environments often experience burnout and disengagement, affecting not only their teaching but also student learning. These findings are especially relevant in the Nepalese context where teacher voice is often excluded from policymaking, and accountability is enforced without sufficient autonomy or support.

A growing body of research has also begun to critique the English-only medium instruction (EMI) policies increasingly being adopted in private and some public schools across Nepal. Sah and Li (2018) argue that EMI policies are often introduced without adequate teacher preparation, leading to superficial language exposure and classroom confusion. This critique intersects with broader discussions on linguistic imperialism and educational equity, particularly in contexts where English is equated with quality while indigenous languages are devalued (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). In Nepal, where language is deeply intertwined with identity and social inclusion, promoting English education without considering local linguistic ecologies risks perpetuating marginalization. The literature thus suggests a more balanced and inclusive approach to English teaching one that affirms local languages, trains teachers to navigate multilingualism, and prioritizes community involvement in education planning. Importantly, this approach requires moving beyond donor-driven or policy-centric models and toward grounded, teacher-led initiatives that reflect the realities of Nepalese

classrooms. Overall, the literature provides a rich foundation for exploring how teacher potentials in English language education can be energized by embracing context, culture, and community as central pillars of pedagogy and reform.

## METHODOLOGY

To explore how teacher potentials can be energized for effective English language teaching in Nepal's socio-culturally and geo-politically diverse contexts, this study adopted a qualitative research design. The choice of qualitative methodology was driven by the need to gain in-depth insights into teachers' lived experiences, teaching practices, and challenges that are often difficult to capture through quantitative measures. As this research is rooted in the belief that teaching is a socially situated and context-sensitive act (Creswell & Poth, 2018), qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis were used to understand the intricacies of English language pedagogy across different regions of Nepal. The study was conducted in five provinces: Province 1, Bagmati, Gandaki, Karnali, and Sudurpashchim—chosen for their distinct geographic and socio-linguistic features. Within these provinces, a total of 20 public secondary schools were purposively selected, ensuring representation from urban, semi-urban, and rural areas. The schools were chosen based on their accessibility, diversity in student population, and willingness to participate in the study.

A total of 25 secondary-level English teachers (13 males and 12 females) participated in the research. These teachers had teaching experiences ranging from 3 to 25 years and came from varied academic and linguistic backgrounds. Data collection tools included semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and the review of institutional documents such as school development plans, teacher training records, and language policy documents. Interviews were conducted in both English and Nepali, depending on the preference of the participants, and each lasted between 45 to 90 minutes. The interview questions focused on teachers' perceptions of English teaching, the challenges they face, their professional development experiences, and the strategies they employ to adapt teaching to local contexts. Classroom observations were carried out to triangulate interview data and capture real-time teaching practices, teacher-student interaction patterns, use of local content or language, and the general learning environment. Each teacher was observed for at least two consecutive English classes, and detailed field notes were taken to record verbal and non-verbal cues.

The collected data were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework, which involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Thematic categories such as "contextual adaptation," "professional isolation," "resource improvisation," "language mixing," and "institutional support" emerged during the coding process. Thematic saturation was reached when no new themes emerged from additional data. NVivo software was used to organize and manage data during the analysis phase, allowing for easier visualization of patterns and relationships. Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study. All participants were informed of the purpose and scope of the research, and written consent was obtained prior to their involvement. Pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity, and participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point without consequence.

In addition to fieldwork data, relevant government policy documents such as the National Curriculum Framework (2019), School Sector Development Plan (2016–2023), and Teacher Professional Development Guidelines were analyzed to examine the extent to which official policies align with or diverge from teachers' lived realities. This triangulation of data sources strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By capturing both the micro-level classroom dynamics and the macro-level policy discourse, the research provides a holistic understanding of how English teachers operate within, resist, and potentially transform their teaching contexts. The methodology, thus, was intentionally designed to not only document the challenges but also highlight the creative and context-specific ways teachers navigate systemic constraints. Through this design, the study seeks to make grounded recommendations for rethinking English teacher development in Nepal.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from teachers across Nepal's diverse ecological regions revealed critical insights into the challenges they face and the strategies they employ to navigate the socio-cultural and geo-political complexities of English language teaching. While the obstacles varied depending on geographic location and access to resources, several cross-cutting themes emerged that shed light on both systemic shortcomings and grassroots innovation. These themes include unequal access to professional development, culturally disconnected curricula, lack of contextual training materials, use of translanguaging practices, teacher agency, and the critical role of community support. One of the most significant findings of this study is that teachers, despite the multitude of constraints, exhibit a strong willingness to innovate and adapt their pedagogy when empowered with even minimal institutional support.

A major theme that emerged across all provinces was the unequal access to training and professional development opportunities. Teachers in Kathmandu and other urban areas reported relatively frequent access to workshops, peer-sharing platforms, and even international webinars. In contrast, their counterparts in rural areas such as Kalikot, Doti, or Bhojpur often had no access to professional training beyond their initial teaching license. Many of these rural teachers reported that training opportunities, when available, were centrally designed, generic, and failed to address their specific classroom contexts. As one teacher from Jumla remarked, "The trainers come from the city, talk about Smart Boards, but we don't even have electricity. How is that relevant for us?" This reflects the critique in the literature that central planning fails to accommodate Nepal's local educational realities (Phyak, 2013; Giri, 2009). Furthermore, even when training was available, it was often conducted in Nepali or English without considering the first languages of teachers or students, further limiting its effectiveness. The lack of decentralized and context-sensitive training limits teachers' ability to engage with content meaningfully and undermines the goal of equity in English language education.

Another critical issue relates to the disconnect between curriculum and local culture. The national English curriculum, though revised periodically, still leans heavily toward Western-centric content, which many teachers find difficult to relate to the lived experiences of their students. Teachers in rural areas consistently reported that textbook topics such as "visiting a shopping mall" or "going to an airport" were alien to their students' lives. This disconnect reduces students' engagement and comprehension and places an unnecessary burden on teachers to make the content relevant. In response, many teachers reported localizing content—integrating local stories, festivals, customs, and names into English language teaching. A teacher from Tanahun shared that she rewrites textbook dialogues using characters from her community and includes topics such as village life and agriculture to better resonate with her learners. This form of pedagogical adaptation reflects a growing movement in critical pedagogy that advocates for culturally sustaining teaching practices (Paris & Alim, 2017). However, such innovations are rarely recognized or supported by the formal education system, leading to what scholars term "invisible labor" of teachers (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Teachers' ability to culturally contextualize their pedagogy is a significant yet underappreciated aspect of their professional potential.

The research also revealed widespread use of **translanguaging and code-switching** strategies in the classroom. Most teachers, especially in linguistically diverse regions such as the Terai and Karnali, used a blend of English, Nepali, and local languages like Maithili, Tharu, Doteli or Tamang to explain concepts, manage classrooms, and give feedback. Teachers acknowledged that while national policy emphasizes the use of English in English classes, exclusive use of English often led to confusion and alienation among students. A teacher in Saptari stated, "If I teach only in English, half of the students will just sit quietly. But if I explain in Maithili and Nepali first, they understand and respond." This practice aligns with global research advocating for multilingual classroom strategies in multilingual societies (Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2000; García & Wei, 2014). Despite their effectiveness, these strategies are rarely acknowledged in training or policy documents. Instead, many teachers internalize a sense of guilt for not adhering strictly to the English-only model, which reflects a deep-seated tension between policy prescriptions and classroom realities. Recognizing and legitimizing these multilingual strategies is crucial in energizing teachers' confidence and pedagogical identity.

Another theme emerging from the data is the importance of **teacher agency and reflective practice**. Teachers who had the opportunity to collaborate with peers, receive feedback, or participate in community forums exhibited greater motivation and innovation. For example, in Kanchnapur, a group of teachers created a local



English teacher network where they shared lesson plans, discussed challenges, and mentored novice teachers. This peer-driven initiative significantly boosted their confidence and classroom practices. Similarly, teachers who were involved in school-level decision-making or curriculum adaptation felt a greater sense of ownership over their work. These findings support Fullan's (2001) theory that real educational change occurs when teachers are treated as active agents rather than passive implementers. However, the study also found that many schools still maintain hierarchical cultures where teachers, especially women and early-career educators, are excluded from decision-making processes. Encouraging democratic school governance and creating space for teacher voice in curriculum reform is, therefore, essential for harnessing their full potential.

Geo-political factors such as **infrastructure, political instability, and conflict** also significantly affect teaching potential. In many parts of Karnali and Sudurpashchim, schools are hard to reach, lack basic facilities, and are frequently disrupted by political protests or natural disasters. Teachers in these areas often walk hours to reach school, teach in damaged buildings, and use outdated or self-prepared teaching materials. In such contexts, even the most committed teachers struggle to maintain regularity and motivation. The government's School Sector Development Plan (2016–2023) has acknowledged these disparities but has not provided regionally tailored interventions. Teachers in these regions need not only physical infrastructure but emotional and psychological support, as many reported feeling isolated, exhausted, and professionally invisible. A teacher from Bajura poignantly expressed, "People in Kathmandu talk about the future of education. But for us, getting to school without slipping from the hill is an achievement." Addressing these challenges requires an intersectional approach that integrates infrastructure development, socio-political stability, and inclusive education reform.

Finally, the **role of community support and local governance** emerged as a critical factor in either energizing or suppressing teacher potential. In schools where community members were engaged in educational planning and supported teachers with materials or social recognition, teachers were more motivated and accountable. Local governments in some municipalities had allocated budgets for teacher-led projects, such as community libraries, student clubs, or supplementary materials. These decentralized models of education governance, introduced after the federal restructuring of Nepal in 2015, present opportunities for localized and responsive teacher support. However, their effectiveness varies widely depending on leadership capacity, political will, and transparency. In several districts, local governments lacked either the resources or the knowledge to support education, resulting in ad hoc and politicized decision-making. Thus, while federalism offers a new avenue for contextual education policy, it also requires capacity building at the local level to avoid the reproduction of old inefficiencies under new labels (Carney & Bista, 2009).

In summary, the findings indicate that energizing teacher potential in English language education in Nepal demands systemic reform, localized support, and cultural affirmation. Teachers are not merely deliverers of language content; they are social actors navigating complex terrains of language politics, cultural diversity, and institutional constraints. Their creativity, resilience, and contextual knowledge must be recognized and integrated into national strategies for teacher development. Rather than imposing standardized solutions, policymakers and educational leaders should focus on building ecosystems that allow teachers to grow professionally, reflect critically, and teach responsively. Only by doing so can Nepal build an English education system that is equitable, inclusive, and capable of responding to the needs of its diverse learners.

## Discussion

In this section, that is your thesis and finding discuss with similar and contradictory latest literature just 5 to 6 years earlier literature.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the critical importance of rethinking how English language teachers are supported, empowered, and engaged within the diverse socio-cultural and geo-political realities of Nepal. As the research shows, teachers across the country whether in the bustling schools of Kathmandu or the remote classrooms of Karnali are striving to make English education meaningful, relevant, and accessible. However, their potential remains underutilized, not because of a lack of effort or commitment, but due to systemic

barriers that constrain their agency, ignore their context, and overlook their lived experiences. The prevailing model of English teacher education in Nepal, which is largely top-down, monolingual, and centrally designed, fails to address the complexities of multilingual classrooms, the cultural specificity of learners, and the localized challenges teachers face. This misalignment results in not only pedagogical inefficiencies but also deep frustration among teachers who feel unsupported and professionally marginalized.

Energizing teacher potential, therefore, is not simply a matter of providing occasional training workshops or updating curricula. It requires a fundamental shift in how we perceive the role of teachers from passive implementers of policy to active agents of change. Teachers must be seen as co-creators of knowledge who bring with them a wealth of contextual understanding, cultural insight, and pedagogical adaptability. Their voices should be central in discussions about curriculum development, language policy, and educational reform. This study has shown that when teachers are given the space to reflect on their practice, collaborate with peers, and contextualize their pedagogy, they can develop innovative and culturally sustaining methods of teaching English even in resource-constrained settings. In doing so, they not only enhance student engagement and learning outcomes but also reaffirm the social relevance of education in their communities.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the need for differentiated, regionally grounded teacher development models. In a country as geographically and culturally varied as Nepal, a one-size-fits-all approach to teacher education is inherently flawed. Training programs must be adapted to local needs, incorporating multilingual strategies, local knowledge systems, and place-based pedagogy. Decentralization, as envisioned in the post-2015 federal structure, holds promise in this regard but only if it is backed by capacity building, transparent governance, and genuine collaboration between local governments, communities, and educators. Teachers in remote and politically fragile regions must also be supported with adequate infrastructure, emotional well-being resources, and equitable access to teaching materials. Without addressing these foundational concerns, discussions about teacher quality and English proficiency will remain superficial.

Finally, this study calls for a renewed focus on critical pedagogy and reflective practice in Nepal's English language education. Teachers must be encouraged and trained to critically examine the cultural assumptions embedded in textbooks, question the hegemony of English-only ideologies, and find ways to connect global knowledge with local realities. This critical awareness enables teachers to challenge exclusionary practices and build classrooms that are inclusive, democratic, and culturally affirming. As Nepal continues to navigate its identity in a globalized world, English education will remain an important tool. But it must be a tool that serves all learners, respects all cultures, and empowers teachers to be the architects of transformative learning. By investing in the professional, intellectual, and emotional growth of teachers, Nepal can create an education system that is not only effective but also equitable, inclusive, and deeply human.

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