Educational Journal
December, 2025, Volume-4, Issue-II
DOI: https://doi.org/10.3126/ej.v4i2.88525
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Empowering the Educators: Understanding Professional Challenges and Resilience among Nepali Mathematics Teachers

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Abstract

Mathematics teachers in Nepal face complex professional problems in the context of limited resources, the variability in learner readiness, technological gaps and rising expectations in terms of teaching quality. This research seeks to understand major problems that secondary-level mathematics teachers are facing in their field professionally and classroom related and also to investigate the actions and coping mechanisms they use in order to remain effective in their work. Adopting a qualitative descriptive design, the study collected data from five teachers of mathematics at the secondary level in different districts using an open-ended online questionnaire. The responses were thematically analyzed by an approach of inductive coding. The results showed four major themes, namely: (1) pedagogical and classroom problems, which were weak foundational knowledge among students, irregular attendance, large class sizes, and low integration of ICT; (2) institutional and policy-related constraints, which included lack of school management support, lack of adequate teaching materials, and curriculum pressure; (3) emotional and motivational struggles, which manifested in loss of confidence, high stress levels, and undervaluation; and (4) strategies to build resilience, which included constant self-study, peer collaboration, use of local teaching aids, student counselling, and positive teacher-student relationships. The study concludes that strengthening teacher resilience in Nepal requires concerted efforts of policy makers, school leaders and training institutions in ensuring that teachers have access to regular training, ICT facilities, mentoring systems and supportive policies which empower teachers professionally.

Keywords: *Classroom difficulties, professional challenges, teacher resilience, teacher motivation*

Introduction

Mathematics plays a central role in the school curriculum because it helps to underpin logical thinking, problem solving and analytical thinking and it has a significant impact on the academic routes of students and their future participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematical (STEM) subjects. In Nepal, mathematics teaching at a secondary level is of particular importance as it affects the performance of the students at crucial examinations as well

as the opportunities for the study of further. Despite this importance, mathematics teaching and learning in the Nepali secondary schools is still affected by the persistent structural, pedagogical and psycho-social concerns limiting instructional quality, student achievement and the well-being of teachers.

Existing research suggests that working conditions of mathematics teachers in Nepal are often challenging in the classroom and the institution. Commonly reported issues are lack of teaching and learning resources, lack of preparedness on the part of students, erratic attendance as well as lack of access to digital tools and access to adequate internet connectivity, limiting meaningful classroom instruction (Khanal et al., 2022). These difficulties were further compounded during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic where many teachers did not have access to adequate training and support to deliver mathematics through online or technology mediated methods (Khanal et al., 2022). In addition to constraints in resources, math teachers often deal with a wide range of learner readiness levels developing in the same classroom, needing to repeatedly remediating foundational concepts and often struggling to balance covering the curriculum with teaching conceptual understanding.

Alongside pedagogical barriers, teachers' roles have become enlarged to include emotional and humanistic. Mathematics teachers are increasingly experiencing the pressure of motivating learners, handling the anxiety related to mathematics, emotional support, etc., which brings additional relational and affective demands on teaching (Khadka et al., 2025). These expectations along with heavy workloads and pressures in relation to exams are contributing to occupational stress and reduced psychological well-being. Research done in Nepal shows that many of the secondary teachers are stressed due to the intensity of workload, lack of recognition, poor remuneration and lack of institutional support (Dhungana et al., 2025). Teacher well-being is also influenced by school leadership practices, organizational climate and socio-cultural expectations with unsupportive environments often contributing to emotional exhaustion. (Devkota, 2025). Similar patterns are reflected in international research where the occupational stress of mathematics teachers is associated with working conditions, performance expectations and a lack of support systems (Antony & Girija, 2025).

At the same time, literature means to highlight the strength and coping ability of teachers. Resilience (sometimes used synonymously with emotional regulation, adaptive coping, professional commitment and collegial support) is important for supporting teachers to maintain motivation and instructional success in the face of constraints (Ramakrishna & Singh, 2022). Studies further suggest, peer collaboration, reflective practice and emotional coping strategies can be used to buffer professional anxiety and stress in mathematics teaching (Simkhada et al., 2025). Other factors such as school climate, collaboration, availability of resources and recognition are also associated to motivation and job satisfaction of teachers and unsupportive environments could undermine the morale and the professional confidence of the teachers (Mainali & Belbase, 2023). Self-efficacy of teachers is also crucial as confident teachers are most likely to try new ways of teaching and also having curriculum overload and limited resources to implement the teaching can also limit such innovation in real life. Even in instances where teachers appreciate student-centered approaches such as project-based learning, because of a lack of materials, training and administrative support, they may revert to teacher-centered approaches (Bohara, 2024).

Although these research works provide useful information on teacher stress, instructional challenges and resilience, there is an important gap in this respect: research works on secondary-level mathematics teachers in Nepal are scarce using qualitative, teacher generated narratives,

which reflect the lived experiences in a variety of geographical settings. Much of the existing research is either survey-based or generalized across degrees, so there is little room to understand how mathematics teachers interpret their challenges and how these impact upon their professional identity and emotional well-being and what types of day-to-day strategies they use to remain resilient to them.

Therefore, this study is designed to examine the issues of professional and classroom related challenges, faced by the teachers in mathematics, at secondary educational level, in the context of Nepal and to investigate the coping procedures and resilience mechanisms they adopt in order to maintain their motivation and efficiency. By foregrounding the voices of the teachers from different districts and teaching contexts, the purpose of this study is to give context-specific evidence that can feed into policy, school leadership practices, teacher education and professional development efforts to strengthen mathematics teaching and teacher resilience in Nepal.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To explore the major professional and classroom-related challenges faced by secondary-level mathematics teachers in Nepal.
- To examine the coping mechanisms and resilience strategies used by mathematics teachers to sustain their motivation and effectiveness amid these challenges.

Methodology

This research employed a qualitative descriptive research design in order to identify the challenges and resilience strategies of the professional challenges of secondary-level mathematics teachers working in different provinces and districts of Nepal. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate as the aim of this study was to understand the lived experiences of the teachers, personal reflections and the meanings they give to their professional realities. Rather than measuring variables or testing predefined hypotheses, the focus on the above allowed for rich and contextualized narratives to be developed that capture the way teachers interpret, respond to and cope with the complexities of their work. Teachers' voices were used as the main source of data, to carry out a detailed study of both the professional challenges faced by teachers and their resilience practices in diverse teaching contexts.

The participants were five secondary-level mathematics teachers who were employed in public schools of different provinces and districts and were representing hilly, rural and semi-urban settings. All of the participants were male, aged between 34 and 52 years, and had experience in teaching between 2 and 27 years. The teachers were drawn from different districts such as Sindhupalchok, Sunsari, Dolakha, Gorkha and Saptari, thus representing different geographical and institutional contexts. In order to ensure confidentiality, all participants were given pseudonyms. Teacher 1 (Sajan Khatri), aged 34, was from Sindhupalchok District, Bagmati Province and had nine years of teaching experience in which he had around 50 students in his class. Teacher 2 (Deepak Adhikari), aged 42, was from Sunsari District, Koshi Province with two years of teaching experience in secondary levels with a class size of 70 or so. Teacher 3 (Kamal Bhandari), who was 43 years old and had an experience of twenty-one years, was a teacher from Kalinchowk Rural Municipality, Dolakha District, Bagmati Province who had a class of 37 students. Teacher 4 (Rabin Gurung) aged 38 years from Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha District, Gandaki Province had seventeen years of experience and taught about 26 students. Teacher 5

(Mohan Chaudhary), aged 52, from Saptari District, Madhesh Province, was a twenty seven years experienced teacher, who was teaching around 60 students. Four teachers had a Master's degree in the field of Education (M.Ed.) and 1 had a Bachelor's degree (Studying M. Ed) in the field of Education (B.Ed.). Also, one teacher is studying M. Phil (Blended mode) in mathematics education at Tribhuvan University of Nepal. With the exception of one participant, all had attended previous professional training or workshops that were related to mathematics instruction. Purposive sampling was used to invite participants who could give detailed and reflective accounts about their professional experiences. Variation in teaching experience, the size of class, the context of school and geographical location led to a thorough understanding of the reality of mathematics teaching at the secondary level, in different regions.

Data was collected using an online open-ended questionnaire created using the Google Forms. The link to the questionnaire was shared with the participants so that they could respond in a private setting and at their own convenience. This method was especially appropriate because of geographical dispersion of the participants, and the requirement of collecting reflective, narrative responses. The questionnaire had two sections. The first section involved collection of demographic and professional background information including age, academic qualifications, teaching experience, class size, district or municipality and participation in professional training. The second section was open-ended questions that were aimed at eliciting detailed narratives about classroom challenges, student learning issues, instructional practices, institutional support, emotional and motivational experiences, stress management strategies, resilience practices, professional development needs and suggestions to build teacher resilience. All the responses were collated and organized teacher-wise for easy systematic analysis.

Data analysis process in this research was inductive thematic analysis. The analysis started with repeated close readings of the responses in order to gain a familiarity with the data and start to identify emerging patterns. Meaningful chunks of text pertinent to the research purposes were coded with descriptive labels such as weak foundational knowledge, irregular attendance, limitations of ICT, emotional strain, lack of recognition along with self-directed coping. These codes were then grouped into larger categories that included student related challenges, resource and institutional constraints, emotional and motivational pressures, and resilience strategies. Through additional synthesis, these categories were grouped into larger themes which reflected both the professional challenges teachers faced and the strategies which they used to sustain their motivation and effectiveness. Interpretation involved cross-case comparison and relating the findings to relevant literature while maintaining the authenticity of the voices of the teachers by selected representative quotations.

Ethical considerations were followed in all stages of the research process. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was assumed by completing and returning the questionnaire. Participants were informed about the academic nature of the study and confidentiality was assured at all times. Real names were only used for internal organization of responses, and pseudonyms were used in reporting. Identifiable information, e.g. school names, was removed to ensure participant's privacy. The findings were presented in a respectful way, taking into consideration the dignity and the professional identity of all participants.

Result and Discussion

This section contains the major findings of the study, which are grouped under the two objectives of the research. The analysis is directly based on the narratives of five teachers of

mathematics at the secondary level from different districts of Nepal. Their narratives indicate the extent of the difficulties they face and the personal and professional capabilities they are able to muster to stay resilient. The themes summarized below reflect common patterns while also recognizing the unique perspectives of each of the teachers.

Theme 1: Professional Challenges Faced by Mathematics Teachers

The professional issues that the participants reported were multi-dimensional and interrelated and influenced by structural constraints. These challenges can be classified into student related factors, resource and institutional limitations and pressures of curriculum and workload.

Student-Related Challenges

All five teachers identified students' weak foundational knowledge as the most persistent challenge in secondary-level mathematics classrooms. Many students progressed to higher grades without mastering essential basic concepts, which compelled teachers to repeatedly revisit prior content. One teacher noted that this lack of foundational understanding resulted in a "significant consumption of teaching time due to constant repetition," leaving insufficient time to complete the prescribed syllabus.

Irregular attendance of students was another major problem, especially in rural and semi-urban schools. One teacher explained that students "often remain absent on alternating days" that required him to counsel students and contact parents; tasks that went beyond routine instructional responsibilities. Another teacher stressed that such absenteeism affected completion of the curriculum and interfered with continuity of learning in the classroom.

Teachers also indicated wide differences in the learning levels of students in the same class. Some students caught on to mathematical ideas quickly and others required frequent repetition and one on one attention. This diversity made it difficult to create and implement lessons that were appropriate and accessible to all learners.

Resource and Infrastructure Constraints

A major systemic challenge that was found by almost all participants was a lack of appropriate teaching materials, digital tools, and technological support. Four teachers explicitly reported about difficulties in integrating ICT due to lack of hardware, unreliable or poor internet connection and inadequate ICT training. One teacher explained that technology integration has been an especially tricky area to work in due to inconsistent access to digital devices, the poor availability of internet and student's limited exposure to using digital tools for learning.

Teachers working in districts e.g. Dolakha, Sindhupalchok and Gorkha complained of acute shortage of instructional materials which limited activity-based and interactive teaching. Large class sizes - with some classes of around 37 and others of 70 students - further reduced time to provide individual guidance and added to classroom management challenges.

Curriculum Demands, Examination Pressure, and Institutional Practices

Heavy curriculum demands and examination-oriented expectations were identified as major challenges by teachers. They said sometimes the completion of syllabus and preparation of students for examinations took priority over development of conceptual understanding. One teacher said "we are forced to be on exam preparation even when students are not ready" which shows how the expectations of examinations affect what is done in the classroom.

Teachers also characterized institutional practices as difficult, especially low levels of administrative support and little involvement in decision-making. As one participant explained, "decisions are made without teachers ask about it, because there is a separation between a school direction and the classroom realities." In addition, the lack of instructional materials and limited technological support limited the ability of teachers to implement effective teaching strategies.

Emotional and Motivational Pressures

Teachers reported on strain/emotions primarily in terms of classroom expectations and instructional responsibility, and not in terms of general dissatisfaction with the profession. Several participants did show frustration with sustained effort not resulting in anticipated learning outcomes, especially in mathematics classes where the students did not have the foundation for understanding. One teacher remarked that the "efforts of mathematics teachers are often not fully recognized" when examination results did not follow on from classroom work.

Teachers also talked about challenges of keeping motivation up when dealing with large classes, lack of resources, and performance demands related to teaching mathematics. One participant said that "taking care of stress and daily responsibilities is hard at times during exams" while another participant said that there was pressure to achieve results in spite of limitations such as large class size and ineffective instructional support. These types of experiences did not suggest disengagement from teaching but instead spoke to the emotional requirements of constant motivation under challenging teaching circumstances.

Theme 2: Resilience Practices

Despite these difficulties the teachers were stalwart in their work. They relied on personal qualities, adaptive pedagogy, social support and intrinsic motivation to support their professional commitment.

Personal Strengths and Qualities

Participants relied heavily on inner strength such as patience, emotional balance, adaptability and positive mindset. One teacher put these traits as what is needed to be resilient in the face of repeated difficulties. Another stressed the importance of coordination skills and the skill to present complex mathematical concepts in simple and easy to understand ways.

Empathy and facilitative approach towards teaching were also important characteristics. One teacher explained that he viewed his role as facilitating and encouraging and not just transmitting of content and had a student-centered and emotionally supportive orientation to teaching mathematics.

Pedagogical Strategies and Innovations

Teachers shared their experiences of adopting a variety of pedagogical strategies for addressing the limitations of resources and diverse learner needs. A number of the participants shared examples of how they used locally available materials such as paper shapes and simple measuring tools when digital devices were not available. Others focused on the use of group work, peer teaching, and language support to help students in understanding mathematical word problems.

Participants also reported adapting their instructional approaches, by going back to the basics, using real-life examples, and encouraging students to ask questions. Such flexibility was

believed to be necessary for handling mixed ability classrooms and to encourage conceptual understanding and confidence of students in terms of mathematics.

Emotional Coping and Stress Management

Educational practitioners engaged in different strategies to cope with stress and have emotional balance. Strategies that were frequently mentioned included time management, reflection on the teaching practice, and informal conversations with colleagues. According to one of the teachers, it was easy to take the challenges and proud to be a teacher that would make him overcome the obstacles. The other one was getting at the problems in a student-like manner once more, with an intention of getting into the depths of the issues they represented, which not only made him clearer in his thinking, but also more emotionally stable.

Motivational Sources

Relational and intrinsic sources of motivation were also a primary factor in maintaining the dedication of teachers. Student achievement and progress were often mentioned by the participants as their major driving factors. A teacher emphasized that the performance of the weaker students was improving which motivated him to keep on teaching with enthusiasm.

Teachers also defined teaching as service and duty. There were also some who were inspired by the educational videos, motivational quotes, and relevant material related to the subject matter, which suggests that personal learning and professional motivation are closely associated with each other.

Collaboration, Relationships, and Community Support

Good relationships with the students, others and the administrators played a significant role in resilience. According to teachers, supportive teachers helped with emotional support, exchange of strategies and lessened personal isolation. A good relationship with students accelerated the rapport in the classroom and strengthened their purpose.

Though the administration support was different in different schools, one teacher valued management committees that had frequent dialogue and were supportive. Such support was found to be a significant source of professional satisfaction and resilience when it was present.

Recommendations as Expressions of Empowerment

Recommendations by teachers to policymakers and education leaders were based on their understanding of the systemic challenges, as well as their hopes of bettering the situation. They demanded easier access to ICT resources, more frequent and needs-oriented professional learning, sufficient teaching resources, more effective systems to guarantee attendance among students, and better appreciation of the role of mathematics teachers. These suggestions may be viewed as the manifestation of agency and ambition indicating that teachers are ready to make their contribution to the reform of education in case of sufficient support.

In summary the findings show that mathematics teachers at the secondary level in Nepal are facing significant challenges, namely, problems associated with student preparedness, resource constraints and systemic pressures arising from curriculum and policy. These challenges can often deter teachers from being motivated, wreak havoc on their emotional health, and prevent them from being able to deliver conceptually rich instruction. At the same time, the teachers show great resilience that is based on personal strengths, adaptive teaching practice, collaborative relationships and deep intrinsic motivation that is associated with student success and professional

service. The findings suggest the need for positive policies, sustainable professional development and improved working conditions to value and build on teacher resilience and the quality of mathematics teaching in Nepal.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to know the professional challenges of the Nepalese secondary level mathematics teachers and the resilience strategies they invest in to cope with the challenges. Five of the teachers described their experiences using the stories that reveal a complicated game of structural, pedagogical, emotional and institutional aspects that shaped their work. Together with the already existing literature, the results may be considered to demonstrate how the teachers struggle to preserve their professional identity and performance in teaching despite the never-ending challenges.

The first aim of this study was to determine the classroom and profession problems encountered by teachers. Consistent with previous studies (Khanal et al., 2022; Khadka et al., 2025), the lack of basic knowledge among students was found to be one of the greatest barriers. All participants said that they spent a lot of instructional time re-teaching basic concepts at the cost of advancing through the curriculum. This finding is consistent with research that shows the learning gap at earlier grades makes it more difficult to teach at the secondary level. In addition, irregular attendance of students also further interrupted the continuity of the lessons, which made a delay in completing the syllabus which was also the concern of Dhungana et al. (2025).

The other significant challenge was classroom heterogeneity. Like Mainali and Belbase (2023), teachers detailed large discrepancies in the level of ability of students. This heterogeneity implied modification of lesson plans, reduces the rate of instruction and re-instruction, which added the strain between the expectation and what students were supposed to know and what they actually had to know.

The issues related to resources were also elevated. The teachers frequently complained about the insufficient teaching resources, poor ICT and the inaccessibility to digital tools - all of them were corroborated by Bohara (2024) and Khanal et al. (2022). The restricted ICT training restricted the functionality of utilizing interactive or activity based pedagogy that continued to maintain the use of traditional teaching methods. These results correlate with the rest of the evidence available in the global scientific community regarding the high level of impact of technological preparedness on the quality of instruction.

Institutional and policy constraints also impacted on teacher motivation. Participants expressed low levels of administrative support, inflexible curriculum requirements, and low levels of professional autonomy. Devkota (2025) stresses on the role of leadership & school culture on how teachers feel, which is consistent with the pressures described in this study. Teachers felt an obligation to cover the curriculum without having the necessary resources - an inconsistency also noted by Simkhada et al. (2025).

Emotionally, these issues created a lot of strain. Teachers shared feelings of stress, low confidence and undervaluation, which is consistent with literature on teacher burnout (Ramakrishna & Singh, 2022; Antony & Girija, 2025). One of the teacher quotes is "the contribution of maths teachers is valueless", expressive of the emotional burden of working in settings where there is a lack of recognition but high expectations.

Despite these barriers, results in relation to the second objective indicated a great resilience among the teachers. Participants used intrinsic motivation, professional identity, and adaptive strategies to help maintain their work. Numerous emphasized the pleasure in seeing the students making progress, which is also popular with resilience frameworks (Ramakrishna and Singh, 2022) and the relational focus of Simkhada et al. (2025).

Personal qualities, such as patience, adaptability and reflective practice also were supportive of resilience. These attributes are consistent with other studies conducted around the world that examine links between teacher resilience and emotions and problem-solving skills. Professional learning as self-study and motivational content further reinforced their confidence which was in line with Adhikari's (2020) views about continuous learning.

Collaborative relations with colleagues, administrators and parents, gave emotional support and practical problem-solving, which can be seen as the social dimension of resilience according to Aykan and Dursun (2025). Teachers' active role in managing and parents showed that they wanted to find solutions despite constraints.

Teachers also suggested improvements such as ICT training, more teaching resources, supportive policies and better school environments. These suggestions are their way of saying that they would like to have more professional agency, and are in line with literature on resilience focused on transformational action.

Overall, the findings suggest that resilience doesn't mean that there is no adversity but it is the ability of people to function in a state of constraint. Teachers' commitment, flexibility and collaboratively offer models of important spaces for constructing resilience amongst mathematics teachers in Nepal.

Conclusion

This study helps to identify the complexities of secondary-level mathematics teaching in different school contexts. The results indicate that the mathematics teachers are faced with linked problems: the deficient foundation knowledge of the pupils, irregular attendance, limited availability of instructional and technological resources, the curricular requirements and the constrained institutional support. Together, these factors shape practices in the everyday classroom and place a lot of instructional and emotional demands on teachers.

Despite such difficulties, the study shows that teachers are active in developing resilience by intrinsic motivation, professional commitment, adaptive teaching practices, and collaborative relationships. Patience, flexibility, reflective practice and relationship-building were found to be prominent features of teacher resilience. Motivation was closely associated with the progress of students and a strong sense of professional responsibility while peer support, administrative cooperation, parental involvement and self-directed learning played important roles in sustaining teachers' engagement.

Overall, the findings indicate that for improving mathematics education, there are policies and practices that can be implemented to acknowledge the lived experiences of teachers, which reduces barriers to teaching, and a strengthening of supportive conditions within the school. Enhancing access to resources, relevant professional development and collaboration and response school leadership can play a role in both teacher well-being and greater student learning outcomes. By bringing the voices of teachers to the foreground, this study provides important lessons for

future efforts designed to build teacher resilience in teaching mathematics and improve the effectiveness of mathematics teaching in different educational contexts.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications

The findings have a number of implications for mathematics education and teacher support. Teacher well-being should be identified as a key element of instructional quality with schools implementing emotional and professional support mechanisms for mathematics teachers. Persistent gaps in students' basic mathematical knowledge point to the need for greater numbers of early grade numeracy interventions and systematic remediation. Limited access to ICT facilities and instructional resources in schools indicate the need to improve school infrastructure for interactive and student-centered approach to teaching mathematics. The study also highlights teacher resilience to be supported and enhanced by collaborative school cultures, supportive school leadership and professional relationships. Finally, curriculum implementation, professional development and school improvement efforts have been less aligned with realities in the classroom due to the absence of incorporating teachers lived experiences.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, a couple of small recommendations are offered. Increased focus on building a strong base of mathematical understanding in earlier grades may result in less instructional pressure at the secondary level. The access to basic instructional and technological resources can help more effective mathematics teaching practices. Opportunities for need-based professional learning, peer collaboration, and supportive school leadership may be additional factors for building teacher resiliency and motivation. Finally, curriculum implementation should offer flexibility to respond to mixed-ability classrooms and reinforcement of the main concepts.

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