



Secondary Level English Language Teachers' Experiences of Digital Professional Development in Nepal

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Abstract

Digital technologies have been introduced into teacher professional development to offer more flexible teaching opportunities and enhance teachers' access to professional development experiences. But the reality of digital professional development in the daily professional lives of secondary-level English language teachers in geographically distant areas of Nepal remains obscure. Guided by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, this phenomenological study explores lived experiences of four English language teachers at the secondary level from Sudurpashchim Province, Nepal. In-depth interviews and field notes were used to collect data, and Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis was used to analyse them. Three major themes emerged from the findings: affordances and benefits of digital professional development, barriers and contextual constraints, and adaptive strategies for sustaining professional development. The findings add to the body of knowledge of digital teacher professional development with context-specific information from an under-researched rural area of Nepal. The study underscores the importance of creating sustainable digital professional development policies, enhancing technological support, and strengthening institutional resources and support for teachers, while also emphasising the need for professional learning opportunities that are both contextually relevant and flexible.

Keywords: teacher professional development, digital professional learning, English language teaching, rural education

Introduction

Education has undergone a rapid digitalisation process that has changed teacher professional development (TPD) by increasing access to webinars, online courses, learning management platforms, social media and virtual communities of practice. These technologies have transformed professional learning from traditional professional learning to a more flexible, collaborative and continuous approach. Teachers' access to digital professional development is still low despite the government's efforts due to the

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lack of adequate internet connection, ICT facilities, institutional support, and digital literacy in geographically remote areas of Nepal (Dhakal, 2023). These constraints hinder equitable access to sustainable professional learning and demands for context responsive professional development initiatives.

Several recent studies have focused on the increasing importance of digital technologies in teachers' professional learning in Nepal. In the major cities, teachers actively utilised online platforms and social media during professional learning. Kadel and Tiwari (2025) observed that providing institutional support leads to enhanced instructional innovation and digital competence. The use of ICTs and digital pedagogy has also been explored; however, they have tended to take place in urban and semi-urban contexts, and to focus on the integration of technology, digital competence or online learning, but not on teachers' experiences of digital professional development (British Council, 2023; Parajuli, 2024; Sharma, 2023). Thus, the experiences and sustainability of digital professional learning for secondary-level teachers of English in geographically remote areas remain largely unknown.

To fill the gap, the present phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of secondary-level English language teachers who participate in digital professional development. It explores how teachers use webinars, online training, YouTube materials, learning management systems, mobile apps, social media, and virtual professional learning networks to develop their pedagogical knowledge and English language teaching, and to consider the opportunities, challenges, and adaptive responses for digital professional learning.

Literature Review

Teacher professional development has shifted from a one-off, centrally planned experience to ongoing and embedded, context-relevant, collaborative learning with teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Digital technologies have helped to enhance this transformation, enabling teachers to access professional knowledge, connect with other teachers, and engage in reflective practice using webinars, online professional development courses, mobile apps, virtual communities of practice, and social media (Gyawali & Mehndroo, 2024). As a result, digital professional learning is seen more as a social process and less as a technical innovation.

Although there is recognition of the potential for digital PD, its effectiveness is still a question that has been debated. Although some studies evidence gains in teachers' pedagogical knowledge, innovation in teaching practices, collaboration, and professional confidence (Bhandari et al., 2026; Karki et al., 2024), some believe that technology cannot guarantee meaningful professional learning. On the contrary, the engagement of teachers is influenced by institutional support, technological infrastructure, digital competence, workload, leadership and collaborative reflection opportunities (Gyawali & Mehndroo, 2025; Saud & Mahara, 2024). The opposing views imply that digital professional development is a product of the complex interplay

between the affordances of technology and teachers' social, cultural, and institutional environments.

This is especially important in English language teaching where teachers have to constantly adjust to new pedagogies, resources and materials, multilingual classes, and changing assessment systems. Research indicates that digital PD allows English language teachers to access authentic teaching materials, to join professional networks, to use new teaching methods and to reflect on their practices (Tamang et al., 2025). But it will take institutional support, professional dialogue, and learning to be responsive to local classroom realities, not generic online training, to make it effective (Acharya, 2025). Hence, PD must be context-responsive, flexible and ongoing.

As the investment in ICT integration and teacher education reform has been growing, research on digital professional development has been gaining momentum in Nepal. Research has been carried out primarily in urban and semi-urban settings, which show increasing adoption of webinars, online learning platforms, social media, and mobile technologies in professional learning (Diyal & Malla, 2025). While the research points to increased access to professional resources for teachers, as well as enhanced collaboration with peers, they also reveal ongoing challenges stemming from inequities in institutional support, technological infrastructure, and teachers' digital literacy.

While these studies have contributed to the knowledge of digital professional learning in Nepal, there are gaps to be noted. Existing research on the subject has been predominantly related to technology integration, digital competence, online teaching, or implementation of an ICT policy in relatively easy and accessible contexts, while there is little focused on the teachers' lived experiences of digital professional development in resource-constrained settings. Furthermore, participants have often been recruited from diverse disciplines, and therefore have limited background to offer the unique experiences of English language teachers. As such, these results are unable to fully account for how teachers in geographically isolated areas engage with digital professional learning in other contexts.

The internet is not stable, ICT infrastructure is lacking, institutional support is limited, teachers are isolated from other professionals, and there are fewer opportunities for sustained professional learning, which all continue to impact teachers' development in Sudurpashchim Province (Saud, 2025). While such structural issues have been documented in previous research, there is limited empirical evidence that offers insight into the lived experiences of digital professional development through the lens of secondary-level English language teachers.

This study is underpinned by Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which defines learning as a socially mediated process, developing through interactions, culturally mediated tools and participation in communities of practice (Vygotsky, 1978). In this way, digital technologies such as webinars, mobile apps, learning management

systems, social media and online professional networks serve as mediational devices to facilitate collaboration, reflection and construction of knowledge. The theory thus offers a suitable lens for examining the factors that affect teacher professional learning, including technological affordances, institutional contexts, professional relationships and teacher agency.

The literature shows that digital professional development is emerging as a field of interest in Nepal, but there are still many gaps. There is a dearth of research that has a phenomenological approach and focuses on how English language teachers at the secondary level in geographically distant areas understand and maintain their digital professional learning in their daily professional lives. To fill this gap, the present study explores the experiences of English language teachers in Sudurpashchim Province and the role of digital technologies in their professional learning in the context of social, institutional, and contextual realities, providing context-specific evidence from one of the least studied educational contexts in Nepal.

Methods and Procedures

The study used a qualitative phenomenological research design that aimed to capture the experiences of English language teachers in digital professional learning in public secondary schools in Darchula District, Sudurpashchim Province, Nepal. Interpretive phenomenology was used as a research method because it provides an understanding of how individuals construct meaning and interpretation of their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Darchula was intentionally chosen due to its challenging mountainous landscape, weak ICT resources, extended power outages, and unstable internet connection, which continue to limit teachers' ability to access regular, continuous professional development despite the national digital education initiatives in the country. The English language teachers who participated in the study were purposively selected and comprised four teachers, aged 30-45 years and having 5-15 years of experience in teaching English, who volunteered to participate in the study. To reach data saturation, eight face-to-face, in-depth interviews (two interviews with each participant), lasting 60-75 minutes, were conducted. To enhance depth and credibility of findings, interview findings were triangulated with field notes that captured non-verbal responses of participants and contextual observations.

The interviews were transcribed word for word, translated from Nepali to English and analysed through the six phases of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis: familiarisation, coding, category development, theme generation, review, and refinement. Data were further interpreted using Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory to explore how digital technologies were used as a mediational resource, the role of social interaction in professional learning, and the role of contextual conditions in teacher agency. Data triangulation, member checking, researcher reflexivity and an audit trail helped to increase trustworthiness and to ensure credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. All subjects were informed of the study and

voluntarily participated, and confidentiality and anonymity through pseudonyms were protected, and data were managed securely throughout the study.

Results and Discussion

This study explores the experience of English language teachers of Sudurpaschim Province, Nepal, in terms of digital professional development. Data analysis based on the in-depth interviews and field notes showed that there are three overarching themes, namely, the affordances and benefits of digital professional development, barriers and contextual constraints, and adaptive strategies to maintain professional learning.

Affordances and Benefits of Digital Professional Development

The findings show that digital professional development has facilitated continuous professional development of secondary-level English language teachers, in a flexible, accessible and continuous way, instead of the usual infrequent centrally organised face-to-face PD. But the experiences of the participants were not similar. Their involvement differed depending on their digital competence, access to technological resources, and confidence in digital learning environments. Teachers who had higher digital skills took advantage of a wider variety of professional learning opportunities, while those with lower digital skills relied more heavily on peer and institutional guidance. The findings show that the interaction between the individual agency of the teacher and contextual realities in which they work mediated digital professional development.

Among the most seasoned participants, mobile technologies had fundamentally changed Ram's opportunities for professional learning. He stated:

In the past I had to wait for there to be a district-level training programme, and that was typically once a year. The overwhelming majority of the time we went back to our schools with no follow-up support. Now, I use my mobile phone to attend webinars, view YouTube demonstrations, download training materials, and review training videos when I have free time, even late at night after school. With this flexibility, I can learn on an ongoing basis, not just through official learning structures that are set up by the authorities.

Ram's story highlights the role of digital technologies as a medium for teacher learning that transcended the time and space of traditional teacher development programs. In line with Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, digital platforms facilitated teachers' engagement with culturally situated tools for accessing professional learning, reflection, and pedagogical creativity. While teachers in urban areas often see digital learning as a supplement to their current professional development avenues (Diyal & Malla, 2025), teachers in Darchula felt that digital learning was their main source of professional development, due to fewer opportunities for face-to-face learning. This finding builds on existing Nepalese evidence, demonstrating

that digital professional development not only serves as a substitute learning tool, but also as a necessary instrument to alleviate professional isolation and promote ongoing professional development.

This was corroborated by field observations during interviews. During the interview, Ram showed the educational apps and channels on his phone and explained that he often downloaded educational content to watch without an internet connection due to unreliable internet facilities. The interview narratives and field notes indicated that the digital technologies were not just sources of information but mediational tools teachers could use to continue their professional learning in the context of resource-constrained settings.

Yet another major affordance that arose from the data was the increase in collaborative professional networks. In addition to engaging with colleagues in their own schools, participants mentioned enthusiastically that digital platforms supported relationships with colleagues in other districts, provinces, and sometimes abroad and in other professional communities. Their involvement, however, was not the same. While Hari and Sita were very active in the online discussions, sharing their lesson plans and experiences, Gita was more passive, observing and downloading lessons and resources because she did not feel confident expressing her thoughts in public. These differences are attributable to the different degrees of professional agency in digital communities. Hari explained:

Before joining Facebook groups and online workshops, my job conversations would be with other teachers in my school, and often the same thoughts would be shared. Now, I share lesson plans, have problems discussed, get useful inputs, constructive feedback, etc. with teachers from all over Nepal and beyond via online communities and learn other teaching approaches from other teachers. Through these encounters, my knowledge of how to teach English has been enriched, and my thinking about my own teaching has become more critical.

This is an example of Vygotsky's (1978) theory that knowledge emerges from social interaction and a process of joint discussion. Online professional communities were not just places to store digital materials but communities of practice in which teachers negotiated meanings, shared experiences, and jointly found solutions to instructional problems. These benefits have been reported in other countries around the world (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Zubizarreta Pagaldai et al., 2026). The findings of the present study, however, build upon the existing knowledge by demonstrating that online communities also serve as a means of bridging geographical distance, especially in remote areas like Darchula, in the process providing opportunities for the formation of professional connections which would not otherwise be easily achievable. In this sense, digital collaboration not only promoted pedagogical learning, but also decreased the teachers' sense of professional marginalisation.

The participants also explained how digital PD positively affected their

pedagogy and boosted their pedagogical confidence. All the participants recognised teaching improvements, but with varying approaches to digital learning. Following these online workshops, Gita often tried out blending storytelling approaches, engaging in cooperative learning, and implementing formative assessment methods. Ram, on the other hand, applied innovations more cautiously, only those which he felt could be implemented in large classes and in the face of limited technology. Such divergent responses indicate that teachers did not uncritically adopt new concepts but rather actively negotiated with digital knowledge. Gita reflected:

I was inspired to get away from lecturing when I saw demonstration lessons and watched online workshops. I started to integrate storytelling, group work, educational games and interactive questioning into my English lessons over time. At first, I didn't know if students would be interested, but with them getting more involved, I felt compelled to try more of this. I feel more confident as I am not teaching my students just one way, but several.

This story shows that digital professional development not only led to the acquisition of knowledge but also to pedagogical reflection. Teachers didn't blindly follow the practices that were laid out for them by the external provider, but took a selective approach to digital learning in their own classrooms. The result builds on previous studies conducted in Nepal, which indicated that teachers' digital competence has improved (Dhakal, 2023; Diyal & Malla, 2025), while in this study, it showed that they actively interpreted and contextualised online learning to meet local instructional needs. In a sociocultural sense, digital technologies enabled teachers' professional thinking; in terms of experimenting in the classroom, it was a process of making meaning that was not technologically determined, but rather was influenced by the context.

Finally, digital professional development was consistently reported as positively contributing to their professional identity and motivation, though the sources of motivation varied. Sita highlighted the factor of enhanced confidence due to interaction with national experts, while Hari attributed it to being motivated by peers' recognition via online communities. These differences indicate that being a professional was not just the result of personal success, but was influenced by several types of social engagement. Sita explained:

When I join in webinars or online professional development, I feel at home in a larger community of English teachers. Despite being in a remote district, I don't feel professionally alone in our school. Hearing from experienced teachers encourages me to keep learning to teach better all the time, and that teachers in the bush can also have great ideas.

The results show that digital professional development doesn't just help teachers become more competent in digital technology; it also helps them develop their professional identity, sense of belonging, and interest in lifelong learning. In terms

of Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, these outcomes are produced in socially mediated interactions where digital technologies are used as culturally mediated sources of collaboration, dialogue and reflective practice. The findings of this study differ from those in urban Nepal where teachers often use digital technologies to augment their current professional learning activities, as teachers in Sudurpashchim are primarily using digital technologies to address geographical isolation, lack of institutional support, and professional learning without the assistance of others. They demonstrate a great degree of professional agency in using technologies that they can access, joining online professional communities, and applying new knowledge to their local classroom situations.

Overall, the results indicate that the affordances of digital professional development extend beyond just enhancing access to learning, but also in the complex interplay between the digital technologies, social dynamics, context, and teacher agency. Although there have been numerous studies in Nepal focusing on digital competence and technology integration, this study shows that digital professional development is a socially mediated process that involves lessening the sense of isolation among professionals, building a sense of professional identity, and supporting ongoing pedagogical innovation in Darchula, a geographically remote region.

Barriers and Contextual Constraints

Participants reiterated the opportunities that digital PD presents, but they also pointed to the complex set of barriers they faced in engaging in digital PD within their contexts, institutions, and technologies. Limited Internet access, voltage issues, inadequate IT infrastructure, high workloads, and lack of high-level digital skills often affected participation in webinars, online training and virtual professional communities. But these difficulties differed among participants. School teachers more than 20 km away from district headquarters had more constraints in terms of infrastructure, and younger teachers tended to exhibit greater digital confidence compared to their more experienced peers. These findings indicate that structural inequalities, individual digital competence, professional experience and institutional support influence engagement in digital professional development. In geographic contexts that are distant, therefore, digital professional learning is not a comparable learning experience, but is rather socially and digitally mediated.

The lack of reliable internet connectivity was one of the biggest challenges mentioned by participants, with frequent power outages adding to the issue. Unstable digital infrastructure was reported to have impacted synchronous learning, the ability to participate in online discussions and the effectiveness of professional development programmes by participants. As for Ram, his school was situated in an isolated village in the mountains; he explained:

I am always excited when there is a live webinar or online training programme, as that is a rare occurrence for us. While participating in the session, however,

the internet often disconnects, videos freeze, or audio becomes garbled. I sometimes dial up a few times and still don't catch the conversation. Despite my keen interest in learning, I still miss out on crucial explanations and demonstrations due to poor connectivity. As a result, I believe that the teachers in remote regions are at a disadvantage to those in urban regions where the internet is far more reliable.

Likewise, Hari emphasised that internet connectivity was not enough as online learning was often hampered by power outages:

When the internet is more or less functional, power failures pose another obstacle. I have attended a few online training sessions, but each time the electricity went off before the training was over. Interruptions make us feel demoralised because we've planned our schedules to attend, and then there are factors we cannot control that prevent us from completing the learning activity.

The stories show that the technological infrastructure is an essential mediational condition that influences teachers' professional learning. Teachers' access to digital professional development opportunities was hampered by the lack of access to the internet and poor power supply, which prevented them from interacting, collaborating, and building knowledge. In contrast to urban municipalities, where the availability of the internet is predominantly considered an enabler for teachers' professional learning (Diyal & Malla, 2025), it is observed that digital exclusion of teachers in Darchula is mainly due to geographic isolation and not due to their lack of motivation for professional learning.

The other important constraint was the lack of institutional technological resources. Participants reported that schools had few working computers, poor Internet access, and inadequate technical support, forcing teachers to primarily use their own phones to access the Internet for professional learning. But participants narrated varying experiences in relation to this dependence. Though mobile learning was useful in small ways due to small screens, storage space and mobile data charges, Sita was frustrated seeing that online learning was not as effective as she thought it should be, while Gita felt her smartphone was an essential professional learning tool, yet had its drawbacks. Gita explained:

The school has very limited computers, some of the older or have malfunctioned. So, nearly all aspects of digital professional learning rely on my own mobile phone. I use it for webinars, downloading teaching resources, watching demonstration lessons and communicating with professional groups. At times, my phone space is filled up, or the screen is too small to comfortably read presentation slides, which makes learning difficult to sustain.

Sita, however, did see a need for institutional support:

I am not so fond of bringing my own cell phone to work, but professional development should not be based exclusively on individual teacher supplies. Internet access, computers and technical support should be made available at school to enable teachers to be involved without straining their resources or personal computers.

These contrasting experiences highlight teachers' commitment to professional learning and that institutional inequalities played a major role in how teachers engage with the digital tools. Inadequate ICT infrastructure in public schools has also been found in past studies conducted in Nepal (Dhakal, 2023). However, the present results contribute to this literature, showing how a reliance on personal devices turns digital professional development from an institutional into a personal responsibility, reinforcing existing educational inequalities.

Workload was also cited by teachers as a major obstacle to PD. Teaching students in more than six classes, creating lesson plans, grading assignments, attending school admin meetings, and other duties left little time or energy for participants to be involved in online learning. However, there were differences in how workload impacted participants. Some of the younger teachers attended webinars in the evenings or weekends, while others, who were more experienced, were more likely to have other family commitments after school and hence not attend the optional webinar programmes. Sita reflected:

Teaching is just one of the things we do. We plan lessons, monitor pupils' work in exercise books, attend meetings, organise school programmes and complete administrative records. Once these tasks are completed, it's hard to focus on another two-hour online training programme, although I am aware that I would benefit from it in my teaching.

These are not stories of specific issues with managing time but are markers of structural conditions in under-resourced schools that require teachers to carry out several roles simultaneously. Workload is also cited as a significant predictor of teachers' involvement in continuous professional learning in several studies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Gu et al., 2025). But the current research indicates that workload and geographical and technological factors have a multiplicative effect that creates a combined disadvantage for teachers in a remote education setting.

Last but not least, participants recognised that inadequate digital competence can sometimes lead to not being able to actively engage in knowledge building in the digital world. All teachers had at least basic technological skills, yet a few teachers reported problems with the use of new programs introduced in the online training programmes. Hari explained:

Occasionally trainers implement new applications or digital platforms without explaining how they function. They are new programmes, and it's hard to follow the demonstrations. We spend most of our time learning about technology, rather than ideas for using it.

Younger participants tended to be more flexible with new technologies, and senior teachers tended to be more comfortable with technologies they were already familiar with. The teachers' capacity to make use of new technologies was related to the mediation and scaffolding they provided, as described in the Sociocultural Theory of Vygotsky (1978). This is what was demonstrated in Hari's interview, where he often used younger colleagues to set up or operate new software he had never used before, before he joined in online training. Overall, the results demonstrate that, in addition to technological access, there are also structural issues related to digital skills that hinder access to digital professional development in geographically distant settings.

Adaptive Strategies for Sustaining Digital Professional Learning

Participants exhibited a high level of professional agency in designing adaptive strategies to ensure digital professional learning in low-resource settings, despite ongoing infrastructure, institutional and technological challenges. Instead of giving up on professional development, they restructured the resources they had, increased peer collaboration, practised reflecting on their work, and tailored digital knowledge to their own classrooms. These strategies ranged from using mostly self-directed offline learning to focusing on collaborative learning and peer mentoring depending on the teacher's professional experience, digital confidence and school context. This variation indicates that teacher agency is influenced by the dynamic between personal agency and the social, cultural and institutional environment.

A common approach was to download professional learning materials to use offline to work with an unreliable internet connection. Participants reported that they intentionally downloaded webinars, teaching demonstrations, research articles, PowerPoint presentations, and YouTube videos when they had access to the internet, and when they did not, they revisited the downloads to make use of them. In his village, he often had to deal with a lack of internet connectivity; he explained:

In our area, there is no guarantee of a good internet connection, and so when I get one, I try to download as many webinar recordings, teaching videos, and reading materials as I can. Later, if I cannot connect to the internet for a few days, I can still learn from the videos that I have downloaded and watched repeatedly. The more I see them again, the more I find and the more I wonder about how I can adapt them in my English classes. I am constrained by the internet, but not stopped in my professional learning.

Unlike simply adapting to the limitations of infrastructure, Ram's approach is a conscientious use of digital technology to facilitate self-regulated learning. The participants of the study leveraged digital technologies to advance asynchronous, reflective and context-responsive learning, whereas their rural partners in urban settings are more dependent on ongoing online engagement to design professional learning opportunities (Baral, 2022). Like in other resource-constrained settings, this study builds on this scholarship by showing how offline digital learning is an output of teacher agency, not just a reaction to a lack of technology.

Ram demonstrated a few folders, such as Teaching Videos, Webinars, and Lesson Ideas, on his mobile phone during the interview. When he had internet access, the materials would be downloaded, and this had become a routine for his profession. These field observations during interviews are also a reflection of the interview narratives to show that teachers actively reconfigured what they had to achieve continuity in the professional learning process, while the infrastructure was unstable.

Collaborative professional learning using informal peer networks was another key adaptation strategy. Participants regularly shared that working with other English language teachers helped them make up for the lack of institutional support and decreased their sense of isolation. However, the cooperation experienced by the participants was different. After an online training session, Hari was keen to ensure informal teacher discussions were coordinated, while Gita preferred to speak with a smaller group of trusted colleagues before testing out new teaching approaches. The differences indicate a type of collaborative learning that involved various social relations and not professional development in a strictly defined format. Hari explained:

Nearby schools have only a few English teachers, and we keep in regular communication. One teacher may attend an online workshop, but other teachers cannot for some reason (internet or school responsibilities); we then share the presentation, discuss the key ideas, and sometimes meet after school to think about how the activities might be implemented in our classrooms. When we learn together, we understand the ideas much better than when we learn alone.

This finding is strongly related to Vygotsky (1978), who believed that learning takes place as a result of social interaction and collaborative mediation. Instead of operating as individual learners, teachers developed informal communities of learning where the knowledge of the profession was collectively reinterpreted, assessed, and transformed to fit local educational contexts. Collaborative professional learning has also been shown to have a positive effect on teacher professional learning and instructional innovation (Richards & Farrell, 2005). In contrast to better-resourced educational systems in which collaboration is formally arranged, the participants in this study created their own professional learning networks, with little formal support. This finding builds on existing knowledge by revealing that collaboration becomes an adaptive strategy in which teachers make up for structural constraints.

Another key strategy identified as important to digital knowledge for contextually appropriate classroom practice was referred to as reflective practice. Instead of taking teaching concepts online without considering them, participants explained that it was an ongoing process of experimentation, assessment and adjustment in response to students' learning needs. There was great variation in reflective practice, though. While Sita kept written minutes after each class, Gita kept notes regularly after applying them in class and changed her teaching methods based on her notes. This juxtaposition

of experiences shows that reflection took place as both a solitary and a communal activity. Gita reflected:

I never use some online training digital teaching idea as it is. When I try out something new in my classroom, I reflect on whether students learned the material, engaged in the activity, and whether it was appropriate for my classroom. When something doesn't work out, I alter it before I use it once more. Reflection is a way for me to learn from things that have gone well and things that have not gone well.

This narrative illustrates not only learning from practice and learning new things, but also critically reflecting on the relevance of what was learned in the local context. Reflection, from a Sociocultural point of view, is a process of mediation that involves internalisation and transformation of external professional knowledge based on contextual realities. This finding adds to previous studies that showed reflective practice is a tool that enhances teacher learning (Morina et al., 2025; Morze et al., 2022), but extends the notion of how reflection can help teachers in some remote settings become more reflective as they work to close the disconnect between global digital knowledge and local classroom situations.

Participants also emphasised the need for the contextualization of digital materials before using them in the classrooms. While online professional development often included examples of educational systems with advanced technology, teachers were aware that many examples needed significant modification to be relevant in Darchula. Sita explained:

Many online training sessions employ scenarios based on schools with computers, projectors or other high-level classroom settings. Our learners are taught in very different circumstances. Hence, I simplify activities, substitute unfamiliar examples with local situations and redesign tasks, which can be carried out using materials available in the classroom. It's only after these changes that the activities are useful for my students.

These contextualisations of digital resources were not a restriction, but pedagogical decisions that have been made with a high degree of sophistication. They translated and adapted online content for their students' linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic context instead of copying or duplicating practices that had been created externally. This finding aligns with research that suggests a contextual approach is needed for effective professional development, rather than a straightforward transfer of teaching models (Langset et al., 2018; Li & Zhang, 2025). It also emphasises that the teacher is an active participant in the design of the curriculum, who validates global pedagogical knowledge by operating in the local classroom context.

These adaptive strategies illustrate that teacher agency is more than a desire to learn and is manifested in intentional actions that involve ongoing development

in the face of context. While some past studies have concentrated on technological access or digital competence (Chia et al., 2025; Sharma, 2023), the present findings reveal that continuous professional learning continues to be enabled by the capability of teachers to reorganise the available resources, work with their peers, reflect on digital knowledge, and customise it for local classrooms. The findings in this study, then, refocus attention from technological availability to teacher adaptive capacity as a primary factor that drives meaningful digital professional development in geographically remote settings.

The overall findings reveal that adaptive strategies are more than just ways of adapting to contextual barriers; they are also manifestations of professional agency. Offline learning minimised the reliance on the prevailing situation of poor internet connectivity, collaborative networks helped to make up for inadequate institutional support, reflective learning resulted in the transfer of external knowledge to pedagogically meaningful actions, and contextualisation ensured that external resources were relevant to the students' lived experiences. These practices, as seen through the lens of Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, demonstrate the ways teachers engaged in and utilised digital technologies as mediational tools whilst simultaneously engaging in social interaction, collaboration, and reflective meaning-making processes to facilitate ongoing professional learning. The study highlights that resilient learning for teachers in Darchula was mostly shaped by their ability to adapt to the context and through their collective agency, thus providing a context-sensitive perspective on digital professional learning in resource-constrained contexts, in contrast to studies from urban and semi-urban Nepal, which focus on the adoption of technology and on digital competence.

Conclusion

The findings of this study add to the body of research on digital teacher professional learning by showing that digital technology availability is not enough to ensure meaningful professional learning; rather, technological infrastructure, institutional support, social collaboration, and teacher agency are all crucial aspects to consider in geographically remote settings. It builds on the previous research of English teachers at the secondary level in public schools in Darchula District, Sudurpashchim Province, Nepal, to demonstrate how teachers negotiate issues of structure to enable ongoing professional learning. The results of this study are understood based on Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which posits that digital technology would perform its role as an effective mediational tool when accompanied by collaborative learning, reflective practice, and pedagogical adaptation that considers the context of learning. The study's contribution to the field of digital professional development is to provide evidence from a resource-constrained setting, which has implications for leveraging digital professional development through better ICT infrastructure, access to reliable internet and electricity, low bandwidth and mobile learning resources, and the development of structured peer learning networks, as well as the development of digital literacy in teacher education programmes.

The study is not statistically generalisable as it focuses on the lived experiences of four purposively selected secondary level English language teachers from public schools in Darchula district and offers an in-depth contextual understanding of the study. It only considers the viewpoints of teachers, and no other school stakeholders such as teacher educators, school leaders, policy makers or students. Further research may explore the differences or similarities among digital professional learning experiences in different provinces, school types, levels of education, and subject specialisations from a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods perspective. There is a need for further research on digital professional development, such as studies of its impact on classroom practice and student learning over time, as well as studies of institutional leadership, professional learning communities, educational policy, and emerging technologies, including the use of artificial intelligence, to inform the development of more inclusive, context-responsive, and sustainable digital professional development systems in Nepal and other resource-constrained contexts.

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